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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[SHE THREW UP HER ARMS WITH A WILD CRY, AND FLUNG HERSELF INTO THE RIVER.]

OH! GIVE HIM BACK TO ME!

CHAPTER VII.

A WOMAN'S JEALOUSY.

WHEN Violet opened her eyes she looked wildly round as the engine gave a shrill scream, and the train rolled slowly out of the station. A sense of loss came over her, though she could not realise why; and she raised her head saying, "Where is he?" only to be met by an earnest glance from Ralph Armitage, whose face seemed uncomfortably near her own.

"You've had a little accident, and we are going to take you home," said Lady Jane, soothingly. "Do you think you can walk?"

"If not, I can carry you," said Mr. Armitage, eagerly. The next moment he frowned as Mrs. Sartoris shrank from him with visible repugnance, and succeeded in struggling to her feet.

She looked after the train with wistful

eyes. "Wasn't somebody else here just now?"

Mr. Armitage muttered something savagely under his breath, whilst Lady Jane answered quickly, "Yes, of course, the Davidsons and the Pierreponts, Major Lushington, little Daubeny, and Charley Maynard."

"And no one else?"

"Really I couldn't count them. All the people who were at the Priory, and a lot of odds-and-ends besides," impatiently. "And now we shall lose our solitary fly if we don't make haste."

Leaning on Mr. Armitage's arm Violet passed through the station, whilst the porters and the grey-haired stationmaster stood aside, eyeing her with respectful anxiety.

The Lady at the Priory was almost unknown to them, for she scarcely ever went up to town or made use of the railway in any way. Her sudden appearance shortly after midnight, without either hat or bonnet, aroused their curiosity, and the injury she had received deepened their interest. Mr. Oslee, the stationmaster, stepped forward and opened the

door of the fly. "I am extremely sorry that such an accident should have happened to you, ma'am," he said respectfully, as he put out his hand to prevent her dress from touching the dirty step, "and I hope there will be no ill-effects."

"Thank you," she said, sweetly, "I am better now. Why haven't you gone in the train?" she added, in surprise, as Lady Jane took her place by her side, and Mr. Armitage put himself on the back seat.

"We are not barbarians, and we couldn't leave you in a dead faint," said Lady Jane, as the carriage drove off. "So you must give us house-room for a few hours, and if we are quite comfortable about you, we shall relieve you of our presence before you are down in the morning."

"It was very kind of you to stay," hesitatingly, as she remembered Ralph Armitage's earnest wish to be allowed to return, and knew that he must be triumphant. "But you mustn't hurry away," she added wearily, for her head was throbbing painfully, "for I've something to say to you."

"Then you must say it to-night—now, this



moment. Never mind Ralph. He's a dear boy, and I've no secrets from him."

The blood rushed into Violet's face. She was not really fit for conversation; but Lady Jane was no nurse, and was bent upon having everything over to-night, in order not to miss the early train in the morning.

Violet put her hand to her head, and tried to think; then looked down into her lap, and remembered that she must have dropped the envelope when she fell.

"Oh! let us go back!" she exclaimed, sitting up in her eagerness. "I've dropped something."

"Not your pearls? No; they are all right," as Lady Jane caught sight of the necklace between the opening of the cloak.

"Anything of value?"

"An envelope."

"Only that? I don't think we need turn back for an envelope"—with a sarcastic smile. "Was it mine? They said you were asking for me, when you came rushing up so oddly."

Violet frowned with pain. Had she really made herself an object of ridicule to all those people? Would they go home and publish it through *Belgravia* that "Sartoris's wife" was more than half-cracked! "The envelope was yours," she said, in a husky voice, "but the writing was my husband's, and the stamp was an English one!"

Ralph Armitage bent forward apparently to look out of the window; but it was really that he might hear what she said, for he was listening intently.

Lady Jane laughed lightly.

"What a fun to make about a trifle!" her freckled face growing red, though hidden by the darkness, and her false eyes shining like a cat's. "Is there any harm in Mr. Sartoris writing to me, when I am one of his oldest friends, and he wants to hear news of his wife and other people? And is there anything extraordinary in his entrusting his letter to a friend, who posted it in England?"

"Then he isn't in England himself?"—a minute disappointment in her voice.

"Really I'm not answerable for his whims and fancies. What did I tell you to-night?"

"That he was in the Andes."

"Now, don't go and publish that abroad. How you do exaggerate! I told you that Ned Clinton had met him in the Andes two months ago. I didn't say he had taken root there. He might be up at the North Pole by this time."

"Jane!" said her brother, indignantly. But the exclamation was lost in the grating of the wheels on the gravel, as the carriage drove up at last at the Priory door.

Mrs. Milton stood on the steps, a victim to excessive anxiety, having lost her mistress in the middle of the night, and not knowing in the least where to find her. When she was told that Mrs. Sartoris had been up to the station, she made up her mind that she must be mad. When she heard that she had received a blow she was convinced that it would kill her. Moaning over her mistress as if she were a sick child, she would not wait to hear another word, but led her away to her room, to be attended to with the tenderest care possible.

"Shall I go off for the doctor?" asked Ralph, with a promptitude that won the housekeeper's immediate approval; but Violet would not let any fuss be made.

"I shall be quite well to-morrow," she said wearily. "Time to send for him when I want him."

Mr. Armitage looked at his sister, but she only shrugged her shoulders impatiently and yawned. She could not understand why her brother took their present position so placidly. He generally objected strongly to the smallest personal inconvenience; and it was certainly trying to pass the night in a house where all the servants seemed to have gone to bed, and no bedrooms were available for their own tired frames.

"That loathsome wedding was at half-past

eleven, and it is now two o'clock. I'm sure that I've been on the stretch for fifteen hours!" Jane remained, with another yawn, as she disposed herself on a sofa in the drawing-room, which was now partially lighted by one candle, which the housekeeper had left on the table. "What is the matter with you, Ralph? Why don't you grumble?"

"I would if it would do any good," leaning his back against the mantelpiece, and endangering thereby sundry and divers costly trifles in the way of china atrocities which had once been wedding presents. "But first I should like to know what you are driving at?"

Lady Jane flushed, but she said composedly, "A night's rest, which it seems I am not likely to get."

"You know I don't mean that. What is all this mystery about Sartoris?" and who was the fellow you were talking to at the station?"

A gleam of satisfaction crossed his sister's face. Ralph had not recognized Jack Sartoris, and the secret was safe at present! She had time still to plot and plan, to thwart the impulses of a husband's rising love, to try and break a disolate woman's heart. Time to play the part of a demure and virtuous wife, and a mediating angel; and her own wild and wilful heart throbbled with triumph at the thought.

She answered her brother carefully. "An old friend, who suddenly sprang up from goodness knows where," and then lay back and let her thoughts travel backward over the forgotten years to the time when she, in the freshness of youth, with an unclouded fancy, and affections ripe as the peaches on the wall, met Jack Sartoris, and that her heart completely at the first sight of his handsome face, a period of unrest and constantly recurring excitement followed, when alternately she doubted, hoped, and feared.

He was always ready to talk to her, for her conversation was not as vaporous as that of many young ladies, who can chatter of nothing but the deceptions and sayings of their acquaintances. He was equally ready to ask her to dance with him, because their steps went so well together; and if he flirted a little it is not much to his discredit when the lady allowed herself so willingly to listen to his pretty speeches.

At one time, led away by her own self-confidence, she actually imagined that some day he would propose to her, and constantly patron a dress he had casually admired, in order to excite his admiration. Lady Jane was tall, with a fine figure, a long nose, light eyes, and almost colourless hair. Her complexion would have been decent if she had not always been freckled. At a boy's school she would certainly have been nicknamed "the leopard," but being a girl, and brought up in aristocratic seclusion, she escaped such ignominy, and consoled herself with the thought that she had a delicate skin. With supreme self-confidence she had gone to a *fête* at Hurlingham, knowing that Jack Sartoris was going to be brought there on the Guards' drag. Of course he would make his way to her side at once, and she hurriedly dismissed all her other male friends lest they should stay, and capture the chair by her side, on which she had thrown her fan. She waited till the game of polo was over; she waited till half-a-dozen others, taking pity on her thirsty state, had offered her the cup of tea which she meant to have received from him.

At last it was time to go, and as she followed her mother with a sinking heart to the place where the carriage was standing, she heard a voice behind her say, "Have you seen the new beauty, old Mayne's daughter? Jack Sartoris is head over ears. He's been sticking to her like a burr all the afternoon!" That was the first hint, soon followed by a second; the courtship was not long, the wedding followed close on its heels. Ah! that wedding-day, should she ever forget it?—the dull, stony despair that settled on her heart like a lump of ice! She shivered now as she thought of it, and then Mrs. Milton's voice roused her from her reverie.

"I've done the best I can for you, my lady. You can have the spare room, and Mr. Armitage can have Mr. Bertie's"—a welcome interruption!

CHAPTER VIII.

A WOMAN'S SIN.

When a woman is thoroughly wicked and corrupt to the very core then the path of sin is easy to her, and she finds few obstacles to stop her steps; but when she is an ordinarily virtuous woman, well brought up, and not naturally inclined to evil, but only led astray by an unfortunate passion—which was innocent enough in its first beginning—then, although she may refuse to turn back, and still pursues her wicked way, there is no peace for her; conscience clamours against her, and all the prejudices and principles of her former life rise up to torture her.

So Lady Jane was not happy. She regarded Jack Sartoris as her own property, who had been stolen from her by Violet Mayne.

All her energies were now devoted to keeping them two apart. It was she who wrote the anonymous letter, which had a fatal sting when the photograph of Cyril Landon dropped out of Violet's dress.

She met Jack Sartoris when he had hurried back to London to make a few final arrangements before starting on his wandering, and her wild heart leapt with joy when she dragged out of him, by a fire of questions, that he and his newly-made bride had agreed to separate.

Hiding this unholy joy in the depths of her breast, she affected the sincerest sympathy, and offered to write to him now and then, and tell him anything she knew of his wife's doings.

He felt so desolate that he caught at the suggestion at once, and said that his letters would be his greatest comfort.

They followed him wherever he went like some venomous insect always ready to sting, and gave him the impression that all his worst suspicions were confirmed by his wife's present course of life.

The fact that Cyril Landon was the Doctor's ward was carefully concealed from him, therefore when he was told of his constant visits to Leighton he naturally concluded that his own wife was the attraction, and in bitterness of spirit kept away.

Lady Jane told no direct lies, but she did as bad, or even worse, by the half-hints, and the veiled insinuations which drove the unhappy husband half mad.

At last he made up his mind to come to England and judge for himself. His rival's delicate health should not keep him from the only revenge that lay in his power.

Lady Jane was in despair when she heard of his resolution—only two or three days before it was carried out; but her quick brain soon developed a plan by which a reconciliation could be prevented.

If he ran down to the Priory, and found his wife waiting for him in dulness and loneliness, her position would go to his tender heart, and when once his compassion was excited he would put aside his pride and resentment, and listen to the explanation which she would be so ready to give.

Then he would take her in his arms, and they would settle down into a model married pair, all the more attached because of their long parting.

At the thought of such a climax Lady Jane's heart throbbled with passionate jealousy. At any cost it must be prevented, and after racking her brains to conceive a remedy she fastened upon the unsuspecting Violet, and insisted upon filling her house with a host of guests whom she did not want.

She then gave her brother a hint to flirt with his charming hostess—the poor little thing had been sadly neglected, and wanted drawing out—there was no reason why she should not amuse herself whilst her husband left her alone.

Ralph Armitage's interest and compassion

were both excited, and his admiration set his brain on fire. He did go as far as he dared, and Jack Sartoris arrived to find his wife surrounded by a lot of people whose faces he did not know, without one of her own family to support the claims of propriety, and in the act of listening to an "insolent puppy" (as he called Armitage in his anger), who told her to forget her husband, and he would be most happy to assist her in doing so!

He saw the rose fall, and Armitage press it to his lips, and did not know that she failed to rebuke him for his impertinence, simply because she was too engrossed by the thought of the mysterious footstep to notice it.

He came, cheered by the news of Cyril Landon's marriage, willing to make the best of any explanation his wife could offer, because of the passionate yearning in his heart and the earnest longing to be friends; he was tired of loneliness, sick to death of exile, and he wanted a home.

In bitterness of heart he turned away, chilled and disappointed. Lady Jane found him in the garden, and as she shook his hand with passionate eagerness, said, reproachfully—

"You ought not to have come to-night; it is the reaction. She has been in such low spirits. You know Cyril Landon was married to-day?"

"I know it!" suddenly—almost fiercely. "I suppose he loved the girl, and that explains his visits to Leighton. You might have told me!"

Lady Jane shrugged her shoulders.

"Does every man marry the woman he loves? When two names have been linked together by the tongues of gossip, an honourable man will do anything to stop them."

"Two names! Do you dare to say that my wife's—" he began, excitedly; but she stopped him by laying her long, slender fingers on his coat-sleeve.

"Don't be angry with me! Go back to London, and come to Eaton-square to-morrow morning."

"But she won't be there?" looking bewildered.

"Of course not. I mean our house, not the Maynes. She must be prepared; she doesn't expect you."

"She doesn't want me!" bitterly. "Speak plain English; don't spare me!"

"Oh, Jack, I would have spared you everything if I could!" in a tone of the utmost tenderness.

There was no response. As he stood in the twilight, gnawing the ends of his drooping mustaches, his thoughts were with his wife—as he had seen her a moment ago—with that other man by her side.

"Was that your brother?" he asked abruptly. "I shouldn't have thought he was the sort of fellow to make up to a woman behind my back."

"No, not! Ralph wouldn't have thought of such a thing. It is only a way he has. And these sort of—grass-widows—don't you call them? are so tempting."

Something like a muttered oath passed his lips, and he turned away.

Then she ran after him to the gate, and begged him to go back to London, and she would meet him at the station and tell him the reason why. And after that she went back to the drawing-room, her cheeks still burning with hidden excitement, and faced his young wife with her false evasions. Oh! the cruelty of so immediately-nurtured women, who would scream at the death of a butterfly, and yet trample on the feelings and torture the nerves of their sisters, with a smile on their lips and a feeling of exultation in their hearts!

Lady Jane had no pity for her victim; even when she lay senseless on the platform of the station—no pity—because the man she loved so recklessly was looking down into his wife's unconscious face with infinite tenderness in every line of his own. At that moment she

could almost have killed Violet, but she did the next most cruel thing when she sent her husband away from her—taking advantage of his bewilderment and uncertainty—to get him out of the way before his wife recovered her senses.

There was no remorse in her heart as she lay awake and tossed from side to side in the comfortable bed of the spare-room—only joy to think that Jack Sartoris was in England, that she had seen him once already, that he looked upon her as his best friend, and that she should see him again before many hours had passed. And all the while she considered herself eminently virtuous, because she would not have run away with him even if he had asked her; whilst she cherished in her heart an unlawful passion, which was another woman's curse as well as her own.

The next morning she rose very early, because she was bent upon going up to town by the 9.15 train.

She asked after her hostess, and was about to go into her room, when Mrs. Milton stopped her, and told her that Mrs. Sartoris had just fallen asleep, and she must not be disturbed on any account. For reasons of her own, Lady Jane wished particularly to be able to say that she had seen Violet, so she begged earnestly to be allowed to creep in on tiptoe; and the housekeeper, thinking that her eagerness was a sign of real friendship, gave way, and pushed open the door gently.

In silence the woman of the world stood by the bedside of her hated rival, and her heart swelled with a conflict of feelings. In her breast there was a struggle between her better self, as she had been when she was an innocent girl, before the breath of passion passed over her, and her worse, when she had listened to the voice of the tempter, and let herself slide downwards like a crest of snow from the mountain-top.

Violet, asleep, with her long lashes resting on her softly rounded cheeks, her pretty lips slightly parted, her soft, dark hair ruffled by restless movement, was a sight to move a heart of stone. Her face had lost none of the innocence of childhood. Purity was stamped in characters that all might read on her broad, white brow; but on her delicate beauty sorrow had set its unmistakable seal. There was something touching in the simplicity of the room—no sign of pampered ease, or modern luxury. The young wife had not cared to spend much on herself. The curtains were of pale pink creponne; and the coverings of the rest of the furniture were to match. All was dainty and refined, with flowers in the vases, and pretty draperies to the bed—an appropriate nest for a simple English girl who had not acquired the habit of self-indulgence.

Lady Jane glanced from the sleeping figure on the bed, to the simple adornments of the room, and a pang shot through her heart. There were so many signs of narrow means—there were so many luxuries wanting, and this in the house of the rich Mr. Sartoris's wife!

She turned away, feeling half-stifled, and drew a long breath when she gained the passage. She shook herself as if to shake off the impression, and said hurriedly to Mrs. Milton—

"This sleep is the best thing for her. The longer Mrs. Sartoris can rest the better it will be for her."

"It's little rest my mistress has had this night, my lady. I had more than half a mind to send for the doctor," said the housekeeper, gravely.

"But there, servants always make such a fuss over everything," Lady Jane consoled herself with, as she hurried over her breakfast. "Will you tell Mr. Armitage that he will be too late if he does not come at once?" she said to Webster, who was in the act of removing her plate.

"Mr. Armitage's hot water was taken up more than an hour ago, my lady; but he sent it away, and said he would ring when he wanted it."

"Dear me, how provoking! I must go

without him!" And catching up her gloves, she went through the hall out on to the steps, where the fly, which she had ordered was waiting. Her maid had gone up the night before. So the Earl of Oldthorpe's daughter had actually to travel to town by herself.

Lady Jane felt equal to that, or any other emergency, when she thought of Jack Sartoris waiting for her in Eaton-square; and as London came nearer, and Leighton was left further and further behind, all pity for the forsaken wife was forgotten in the joy of meeting a dangerous old friend.

CHAPTER IX.

A WIFE'S DESPAIR.

Ah! how her head ached as slowly Violet Sartoris walked into her drawing-room about twelve o'clock.

She thought she would lie down on the sofa and say "Not at home" to anybody who happened to come, because she felt she must be alone with her bewildering thoughts; and this strange buzzing in her head.

And as she thought it a man picked himself up out of an armchair in which he had been lounging, with a yellow-backed novel in his hand, and came towards her with a great eagerness in his eyes.

She stopped, and drew up her neck, uncertain how to meet him. She looked like a hind with its dainty head upraised at the first scent of danger in the wind, and a slight colour mounted to her cheeks.

"Mr. Armitage! I thought you had gone with your sister?"

"Did you think I could go without knowing how you were?" as he took her hand, and bowed low over it before he let it drop.

"Lady Jane would have told you," as she made her way towards the sofa, holding on to every little table or chair as she went.

"I wanted to see with my own eyes. You are ill now! You have no business to be up," watching her with real anxiety.

"I could not stay in bed," putting her hand to her forehead. "Oh! Mr. Armitage, did you ever feel as if you would go mad?" she asked, abruptly.

"Mad as a hatter, after a fall from my window in Tom Quad. They had to strap me down, and put tons of ice upon my head, or I believe I should have murdered my best friend," he said, cheerfully, though his eyes were still watching her every movement.

"I wish Bertie were here!" in a low voice, as she nervously plaited the fringe of an antimacassar.

"Shall I telegraph for him? Do you want him really?"

"Yes, but he's away," the corners of her mouth drooping, "and I'm alone—alone, with nobody to look after me!"

Ralph Armitage got up from his seat strangely moved, whilst his mind ran over all his women friends, and he wished to Heaven that the kindest and the most womanly of them all were here to take care of the poor child.

His own sex handicapped him, so heavily that he was at a loss what to do, and yet, the dormant scrap of scrap of chivalry in his composition was roused by her desolate position.

"Mrs. Sartoris," he said, and his voice throbbled with genuine feeling. "I am but a recent friend; nevertheless, I am heart and soul at your service."

"Oh, yes!" with a queer little laugh, which somehow jarred upon his nerves. "You would do anything for me, I know; but Cyril said the same, and where is he? And, Jack, so long ago—so very long ago—he promised, and he vowed, that I was all the world to him, and he went away and never came back! Oh, men! men! men!" getting up, and walking about the room excitedly, as she clasped and unclasped her hands, "they are all alike."

The girl who trusts one of them is sure to break her heart!"

Ralph watched her alight figure in the white dress flitting to and fro, and his uneasiness grew into absolute fear.

"Mrs. Sartoris," he began, gently; but she stopped him with an imperative gesture of her small white hand.

"Don't call me by that name. He has disowned me."

"But it is yours. He can't take it from you. Oh! curse him a thousand times for bringing you to this!" his heart swelling with sympathy for the deserted wife, and rage against the deserter.

"Hush! I won't have it. No one shall curse Jack! Have you ever seen him? His eyes were so blue and so honest they couldn't deceive you," with a tender smile lighting up her almost ashen-coloured face. "Oh, give me back to me!" clasping her hands against her chest, her voice sounding almost like a wail.

"I will!" said Mr. Armitage, hoarsely. "I will do anything on earth for you—only be calm;" and he tried to lead her back to the sofa, thinking to himself, "Oh! if Jane had only stayed till a decent hour, instead of skurrying up to town as if a mad bull were at her heels!"

"I am calm. There's nothing the matter with me!" snatching away her hand impatiently, and trying to recover a purely conventional manner. "Pray be seated, Mr. Armitage. Is there anything in the papers?"

"Nothing," for at the moment his mind felt quite a blank as to external affairs, being so fully occupied with those of this one particular house. "There seems to be a probability of war with Russia," he added, because she appeared to be waiting for an answer.

"War!" and she raised her head, and looked at him with eager eyes. "War is horrible!" shuddering. "Think of the wives who lose their husbands. Gone never to come back—never—never! The cold earth hides them, the rain falls on them, the wind howls amongst the trees, and the children are crying at home. Jack isn't a soldier, thank Heaven! so he's sure to be here soon. They can't make him fight, can they?"

"No; he left the army when he married."

"Did he marry?" brushing back a stray lock which had fallen over her face. "Sometimes I think it was a dream. Do you remember it—the crowds in the Abbey, the flowers on the ground, the pealing organ, and the tall, grey arches? There were carriages and carriages outside, and ours had a brown horse and a white, and the brown horse kicked, and Jack told me not to be frightened."

Again she rose from her seat, and, standing before him, drew her brows together as if perplexed.

"After that we were in the train—so happy—oh, so very happy! and then something happened."

"What was it? Oh, tell me! Don't you remember?"

"No; I never knew." His ears were wide open, as he thought himself on the brink of the mystery which had so long been the standing puzzle of Belgravian society.

"I know he went away, but why—I have forgotten. Oh! Mr. Armitage, help me!" holding out two small hands imploringly.

He caught them, and pressed them to his lips.

"Only tell me how?"

She let her feverish fingers rest in his, as if she had forgotten that they were in his grasp, and he looked down into her lovely, troubled face, his heart beating fast. Oh! if Sartoris were only dead! He would have taken her then and there in his arms, and told her to forget her troubles in his love, after a short acquaintance of about twenty-four hours! "I don't know how, but you must find him, and I will love you."

"You—you will love me!" scarcely believing his ears, as the blood rushed up into his face.

"Yes, I will love you more than anyone else on earth. You must be kind; you can't refuse me!"

"I can refuse you nothing," doubting if he himself were dreaming. "But where can I find him?"

"Oh, in South America, or Africa, perhaps; in Siberia—wherever there is sport to be had, or something to be shot."

The field seemed rather wide. Mr. Armitage's zeal was somewhat staggered. She could not even tell him in which hemisphere to begin, and a mental picture rose up before him of himself careering wildly over the barren wastes of Africa, whilst the man he was chasing was enjoying himself at California or Peru.

"You haven't a clue, I suppose?" he asked, doubtfully.

Violet started, as if she had forgotten his presence.

"Ask Lady Jane—she knows. She had a letter from him, and I—I haven't had one line for hundreds of years. Oh! some day I will go and hide myself, and he won't find me—hide myself in the river where it's deep and dark and cool, flowing under the bridge. I could go now, only not a word to Milton. Poor old soul, she would be sorry."

"Mrs. Sartoris!"—she frowned, "Violet, listen to me. You are ill, you must keep quiet. Lie down on the sofa!"

"I'm not ill. I will go out," trying to pass him. "I will go to the river; my head's on fire!"

He was terribly alarmed. Every window was open, besides the door. How could he ever stop her without recourse to absolute physical violence. In a moment she might dart through one whilst he was guarding the other. Oh! if anybody on earth were with him to advise or help!

For a few minutes she was quite silent, with her hands pressed to her throbbing temples. Nobody could guess what was passing through her troubled brain. She had been so hardly used—and none had known how deep the iron had entered into her soul, for with womanly pride she had hidden her pain. For years the sorrow and the sickness of hope deferred had lasted; for years she had carried a brave front, whilst her heart was breaking. It wanted but the accident at the station to bring matters to a climax—the mischief had been brewing for ages, as week succeeded week of hopeless waiting. She was so still that Ralph Armitage thought he might venture across the room to ring the bell. He was sure that a doctor ought to be sent for, and that at once. He trod softly, so as not to arouse her attention; but for a minute or two he ferreted about without finding the handle of the bell, which was nearly hidden behind a hothouse plant. In his relief at finding it, he rang a peal, and then turned round with as innocent an expression as he could assume. The innocence was followed by dismay—Mrs. Sartoris was no longer in the room! With two or three strides he was out of the furthest window; but as he looked eagerly in every direction she was nowhere to be seen!

Mrs. Milton, who had been uneasy all the morning, having caught sight of his face from an upper window, came running out to hear what was the matter, at the same time as Webster, startled by the loudness of the bell, and surprised at the emptiness of the drawing-room, appeared at one of the windows.

"Your mistress is very ill!" said Ralph, hurriedly; "and I don't know what has become of her!"

"I thought she was safe in the drawing-room with you, sir!" looking at him with anxious eyes.

"So she was; but she ran out when my back was turned! Where's the river? We must find her at once, or I won't answer for the consequences!"

"Oh, Heaven! you don't think she would do that?" her faithful breast heaving with a sob; and then she pointed towards the shrubbery, and ran down the path wringing her

hands. Mr. Armitage sprang over a fence which divided the garden from a grassy slope, and, cutting off a corner, made for the end of the shrubbery. Webster followed cautiously, with wild gesticulations to George, the gardener, to come and help. He came, wide-eyed and open-mouthed.

"Your mistress!" panted the butler, as he nearly went head-foremost over an ant hill; and George, utterly mystified, ran on, seeing that, for some reason or other, haste was urgently needed. Ralph Armitage cleared a gate at a bound; and then, turning round with a face white with fear, held up his hands to tell them to be on their guard.

Poor Milton stood still, shaking like a jelly-fish, and mopping her face with her pocket-handkerchief, whilst her heart sounded like a hammer in her ears. The others drew up like pickets posted at different distances; Ralph went forward cautiously. The river was flowing at his feet almost with the haste and the force of a mountain torrent. The sunshine was laughing on the sparkling waters; the poplars were standing straight and tall against the deep, blue sky; a thrush was singing sweetly in a thorn-tree close by. All these details, in after-times, seemed to have been burnt into Armitage's brain; but at the moment he was only conscious of Violet's slight figure standing in the middle of a slender plank bridge. He advanced as noiselessly as he could on the long, soft grass. She turned her head quickly, moved by some sudden instinct, and saw him. He held his breath—she seemed to waver like a flower in the wind; the next moment she threw up her arms with a wild cry, and flung herself into the river. The bubbles flew upward to the sky as Armitage tore off his coat, kicked off his boots, and plunged in to the rescue; but the current was strong, and the stream rapid; and the servants, watching in frantic fear, saw the white dress gleaming faintly amongst the weeds, already many yards away!

(To be continued.)

TWICE CHOSEN.

—30—

CHAPTER XXIV.—(Continued.)

SUE turned up to his, a white wondering face, and he continued,—

"When I was a boy, I had a governess who was very fond of me, and my father pensioned her for her lifetime. She lives in a tiny cottage within my park gates. She would receive you if I asked her."

"And you would ask her?" she demanded in astonishment.

"Yes! Yours was a noble sacrifice, and it has been ill rewarded. You spoke of Cavenci requiring another lie of you. Will you tell me what it is?"

"I will!" she answered, after a pause. "Do you know what he is trying to do now?"

"I believe I do. He is endeavouring to get a young and rich widow into his power."

"That is it; and he wants me to help him."

"How?"

"I am to state that I am his sister, and that Lord Lynstone married me privately in Italy, but not being happy with him I ran away, and let others tell him of my death; but that, being still alive, the Countess had never had any claim to the title of wife, nor right to the property left to her for herself or her son."

"But the certificates! He could not produce them!"

"Could he not? Carlo can accomplish anything upon which he has set his mind, and all priests are not above being bribed!"

"What a vile plot!" he cried, passionately. "Signora, you will not lend yourself to it!"

"If I cross him, do you know what will happen?"

"No."

"Marie Cavenci will be seen and heard of no more."

"You will be perfectly safe with my friend."

"Should I?" she asked eagerly. "And is this lady he is pursuing a friend of yours?"

"A very great friend."

"Then I will never say it, for your sake, for you have spoken kindly to me. He can but kill me!"

"Poor girl! It is too late to find you a place of refuge to-night, but early to-morrow I will provide you a safe asylum, and in a few days you shall go to a permanent home. Give me your present address, and pack up whatever you desire to bring away with you, but let it be only what you can carry, and tell me one at your lodging that you are going away, for doubtless they are all the creatures of Cavenci. Go out at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, and at the end of the street you will see a four-wheeler cab. Follow it, and you will find me in it. Do not keep me waiting, as I must be back here at nine o'clock. Cavenci must not miss me from the breakfast-table. When he seeks you in the afternoon he will find his bird flown! Do you understand my plan?"

"Yes, and I am more than grateful to you, Signore. No one knows what I have suffered; it is time it ended."

"Quite time; and no other woman shall fall a victim to him if I can help it. And now farewell, I must return to the house, as I am keeping the servants up. At eight to-morrow, remember."

"At eight, and Heaven and Our Lady bless you."

The butler was waiting for Lord Carruthers, and admitted him at once, and was well rewarded for his vigil.

"Is Hervey up?" inquired his lordship, referring to his own valet.

"Yes, my lord; he is waiting for you."

"Then send him to my room at once," and Lord Carruthers went upstairs with rapid strides. He was elated at having so easily discovered all he desired to know.

"He said he would tell her to-morrow," he soliloquized; "he must have ascertained that the Duchess is going out; but, never mind, I will be upon the spot."

His man entered, and he desired him to call him at seven o'clock punctually, and to have a four-wheeler cab at the door by a quarter-past, but to make no comments upon his movements to the servants in the house; then he dismissed him to bed, and was glad to be alone.

"Poor Adela!" he said, after a pause of thoughtful reflection. "Poor girl! I would to Heaven I could help her in her trouble. If only she had not told me of her love for that other, I would yet again have offered her the shelter of my care. If she has got over it, her heart might even now turn to me." Then arose in his mind the question whether he really loved her still?

The hope and passion had died out of his heart little by little. Was what remained really love?

He was unable to answer the query which he had raised. He had believed himself to be not only true, but steadfast in his attachment to Adela; and now, between the memory of her face and his, floated another image—that of Rosamond, the young widowed Countess of Lyneston.

"No, no! I shall ever love Adela!" he asserted, impatiently. "I will see her again, and she will be as dear to me as ever; and yes, I will ask her once more to be my wife; and, having so determined, he seemed better satisfied with himself."

But it was of Rosamond he dreamed in his fitful, uncertain sleep.

Punctually at seven he was called, and after making a hurried toilet, he hastened down-

stairs as noiselessly as possible. The cab was at the door, he jumped in. On his way he stopped at a respectable looking house, though certainly not in a fashionable neighbourhood, and, getting out, knocked at the door, which was quickly opened by a neat-looking, elderly woman.

"Lor's a mercy, my lord, only to think of seeing you so early!" she cried, in unfeigned astonishment.

"Yes, I am early, Mrs. Rawlins; I want your help."

"And that you shall have, my lord; there's nothing as you can ask, to which I'd say no, having served the late dear lord for thirty years, and owing the roof over my head to his generosity."

"I felt sure you would assist me," he said, with a kindly smile. "Have you two nice rooms vacant?"

"And that I have—the first-floor."

"Then I'll engage them at once, and I want the tenant to come in within an hour."

"Dearie me! Well, everything is clean and tidy, so I've no call to raise objections."

"The lady who I shall bring here is very little known to me, but she is in great trouble, and I want you to be kind to her."

"Lor, sir! you're always a helping someone; and that I will, with pleasure!"

"And don't talk about her to your friends and neighbours, if she seems at all strange."

"She ain't —" and Mrs. Rawlins touched her head suggestively.

"Not a bit, only in deep sorrow; and now I'm off. I will drive her here myself," and his lordship went briskly down the steps.

"He's a Carruthers," murmured the old woman, contentedly. "I need have no fear, they're good, everyone of them, and if she was not all right, he would not bring her here; but I wouldn't have received a tenant at such short notice from anyone else," and Mrs. Rawlins, having dusted the rooms, laid the breakfast things and put the kettle on to boil, and tidied herself to receive the new arrival.

Signora Cavenci was waiting in the street when the cab drew up at the end of it, and hurried to the vehicle.

"No one is down yet," she whispered, as though fearful of being heard. "I have only brought this," placing a small leather bag upon the seat opposite. "He bought what few things I have, so I thought I had better leave them."

"Quite right. Miss Wheeler will see that you have all you need."

"Is that the name of your old governess?"

"Yes; and now I am going to take you for the present to our old cook, Mrs. Rawlins; Mrs. by courtesy," he laughed.

"May I know the name of my friend?" she asked, looking up at him.

"Carruthers," he returned, "and, Signora, I will be a friend to you."

She clasped his hand gratefully, and after a moment's hesitation pressed her lips to it. And he left her in Mrs. Rawlins' charge; and desiring that everything should be provided for her comfort, she promised to see her again ere long, and drove away as fast as the horse could carry him, arriving at the Duke's mansion in Park-lane before nine.

He rushed upstairs to his room, and hastily refreshing himself with the cold bath he found prepared for him, arrayed himself in the clean linen, and clothes which his valet had placed ready to his hand, and was downstairs in the breakfast-room within a few minutes of the gong sounding.

The Marchese was already in the room, and Lord Carruthers received his matutinal greeting with a cold bow, which was noted both by host and hostess.

Later, he had had the short conversation before mentioned with her Grace, when she came down ready for her start.

Then he wrote a note to Lady Lyneston, sealed it, gave it to the butler, and desired him to let her maid deliver it at once to her ladyship.

She received it with wonder, at first fearing

it was from the Marchese, but her face relaxed into a smile as she turned to the signature. It was marked *private*, and ran thus,—

"DEAR LADY LYNESTONE,—

"The Marchese is in my power; do not fear him. It is better that he should expose his own villainy. Come down into the drawing-room as though you suspect nothing; he will soon join you. Remember, I shall be behind the screen and shall hear all he says, and be ready to protect you. Give him rope, and let him hang himself, and his persecution will be a thing of the past.—Yours sincerely,

"CARRUTHERS."

She read it a second time attentively, and smiled, then, dressing herself in her prettiest costume, descended to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XXV.

"ON GUARD."

LADY LYNESTONE ensconced herself in a low easy chair, and drew from a pretty work-basket some dainty embroidery, and began to stitch leisurely, without once turning her face to the magnificent oriental screen at the further corner of the spacious apartment; but, nevertheless, her thoughts, if not her eyes, were centred upon the person it was hiding from her view.

How good he was to her! and if only he could really rid her of the presence of the absolutely hated Marchese, how glad she would be!

Not for the world would she thus risk meeting him, but for Lord Carruthers' written words. As it was, she was more than willing to trust herself to his guidance, and follow his advice. She had not long to wait.

The Italian came through the conservatory, singing an operatic air, in his rarely beautiful voice. Greatly as she disliked him, she paused to listen, her senses stirred by his wonderful power. He stood in the doorway, and saw the softened look upon her face, and smiled.

"My music pleases you, Contessa," he said, in a low voice; and walking to the piano he poured out what appeared to be his soul, in a passionate love song; then suddenly he was at her side.

"Contessa!" he said, softly; "I sing for you; all I have sung is for you; no words, no melody, are too sweet to tell you how I love you! You need no telling; every woman knows when she is beloved; but it is my pride and my pleasure to pour out my heart before you as water. Contessa, give me the joy of knowing that love has begotten love!" and he bent over, and looked into her eyes.

An indignant flush mounted to her cheek. "Marchese," she said, gravely; "I have given you no encouragement to address me thus; and more, I decline to listen to such words from you. You could never gain my affection, so it is useless for you to try."

"Nay, sweet one, do not give a hasty judgment; you may see that it is better to have a friend and husband and protector, than to meet trouble alone."

"Trouble of course comes to all, but my good lord has shielded me from most cares by his kind thoughtfulness for me."

Your good lord!" he echoed ironically.

"Did you really believe in him, Contessa?"

"Did I believe in him?" she repeated, looking him fully in the face; "most truly and firmly!"

"Poverina!" he said, softly.

"I do not require your pity, Marchese di Riviera," she answered, proudly.

"Poor child! You do not know."

"Know what? If you have anything to say, say it."

"As you will," he replied with a shrug of his shoulders, and drawing a chair to her side, he seated himself, and looked earnestly in her face.

Did you believe Lord Lyneston to be a bachelor when you married him, Contessa?"

"A bachelor! Of course he was; a confirmed old bachelor. No one ever expected him to take a wife to dear old Lynestone," she said, with a smile.

"Yet he might have taken one there, had he chosen, some years before he took you to share his home, poor girl," he answered, compassionately.

"What do you mean?"

"Contessa, how can I bear to pain you, I who love you," he answered, with a foreign gesture.

"Pray do not spare my feelings."

"If I might—if I dared."

"I beg you will proceed."

"You do not know what you are asking, Contessa; Lord Lynestone had married before."

"Do you mean to tell me that my husband was a widower?"

"Alas! no! His wife, or rather widow, still lives."

"Of course she does; I am not afraid of my own shadow, Marchese," she laughed.

"Poor child! you laugh! Yet you never were his wife; my own sister was Lady Lynestone, and she is yet alive."

"Your sister! Oh! there must be some grand mistake."

"Not so; he married her in Rome, and she is now in town to claim her name and property, if I will tell her. You and your boy are nameless and penniless, poverini! Now do you think I love you, Rosamond, or no?"

"If this were all true I should acknowledge the fact of your affection, however ill-placed it might be," she answered gravely.

"My darling!" he continued, taking her unwilling hand; "my sister shall never breathe this sad secret, never throw a shadow over your fair name, nor ruin the future of your bright-eyed boy. Give me the right to protect you, and I will do so with my life."

"My hand is then the price of your silence?"

"It is."

"Marchese," she said, rising and drawing herself up proudly. "If the title and property are your sister's, nothing would induce me to do her the great wrong of retaining them. Neither my fair fame, nor my boy's future, could tempt me to commit so gross an act of injustice. Let your sister prove her rights, and I will give up my claims without a murmur."

"Brave woman!" whispered Lord Carruthers in his hiding-place.

"And you care nothing what the world will say of you?"

"Nothing!"

"Rosamond, you shall not thus sacrifice yourself. I will protect you in spite of your wishes," and he flung his arm about her.

"Don't touch me, sir," she cried, indignantly.

"Am I to be insulted in her grace's drawing-room?"

"No," answered a voice.

The Marchese di Riviera, or Carlo Cavendi, started, and in another moment he and Lord Carruthers stood face to face.

"Coward and liar!" cried his lordship, with flashing eyes.

"Such words to a Roman nobleman!" blustered the Italian. "Your lordship shall answer for each one."

"I will, with a horse-whip!" returned the other coldly, "if you are not out of this house, bag and baggage, in a quarter of an hour."

"Are you its master?"

"I am yours, Carlo Cavendi. I was in court when you were tried for robbery and murder, and when you bought your wretched life at the expense of a woman's honour. Maria Paraviso's was a noble sacrifice, and you have generously repaid it. Go, and never let me see your face again, or you may regret the day you crossed my path. The whole vile tale you have woven to bend the Countess to your will, is a tissue of lies. You have no sister, but you have a wife, whom you have left to pine in a low lodging-house,

among coarse and brutal people, unfit to come near a refined woman. If you take my advice you will leave England before worse comes of it."

He crossed the room and rang the bell.

"Call a cab for this person," he said, indicating the Italian to the butler, "and let him have what assistance you can to get him away as soon as possible."

The well-trained servant let no surprise appear in his face. He bowed, and held the door open for Carlo Cavendi to pass out.

The man stood like a stag at bay. He knew that the game was up.

For one moment he let his eyes rest with a bitter hatred upon that other who had defeated all his plans.

"We may meet again," he muttered through his clenched teeth, and turned from the room without another word.

"He will trouble you no more, Lady Lynestone," said Lord Carruthers, kindly; "but I fear, as it is, he has scared you, notwithstanding my warning," and he took her hand, and led her to a seat.

"Oh! Lord Carruthers! what a dreadful creature! I am afraid of him, and that's a fact. What did he mean by saying such awful things?"

"His words meant that he is both a ruffian and an impostor. He wished to frighten you into marrying him; by this hoggy of his own wicked invention, for there is not a word of truth in anything that he has said. The story of Lord Lynestone's former union is as false as his pretended love for you. Bah! the word is not fit to come from his lying lips. I am thankful I came here, and that I have been able to unmask him, for had I not done so he might have given you real trouble. If he had told you this cruel tale, and you had believed him, and consented to keep it a secret, goodness knows where the evil would have stopped. He would have had you in his power!"

The Countess shivered.

"I hope I should have had the strength of mind to tell him to do his worst; but who can tell?" she added, in a low voice.

Then she lifted her eyes to his, and stretched out her hand to him.

"You have been a real friend to me, Lord Carruthers! I shall ever be grateful for your kindness, and I hope we shall know more of each other."

"I sincerely reciprocate your sentiment," he answered, as he pressed her hand affectionately; "and if ever I'm in the vicinity of Lynestone I shall claim the privilege of a friend, and call upon you."

"Will you come to Lynestone and stay?" she inquired, warmly. "The Duchess has promised to pay me a visit shortly, and if you will accompany her I shall be more than glad."

"Do you mean it?" he asked, after a thoughtful pause.

"Yes; indeed, a hearty welcome will await you, if you do not object to the dulness of the dear old place. But I can offer you good shooting, and fishing, and hunting too, if you are fond of the sport."

"Then I will come," he said, decidedly; "if her grace will accept me as an escort. But mind," he added, with a smile, "it is neither the shooting, fishing, nor hunting which has tempted me; but the desire to improve a friendship so pleasantly begun."

"Really?"

"And truly!" Then silence fell between them and she took up her fancy work, that woman's refuge upon all awkward occasions.

She was the first to speak.

"How surprised our host and hostess will be to find their guest gone?" she said, with a smile.

"And glad, too, I am sure."

"I am certain of that; they never liked him."

"And yet they invited him to their house! Oh! society, society!"

"Yes; society is very hollow; people never pause to judge for themselves what men or

women are. They are received everywhere, is answer enough, however bad they may be."

"In fact it is a case of one fool makes many."

"That is just it; I have enjoyed my peep at the bright world, but I should not care to live in it; there is too much glare and glitter, and too little sincerity and reality. I am happier in quiet, grand old Lynestone. The trees suit me better than the lamp-posts; the curseys of my poor tenants than the bows of the 'upper ten'; and the deer in the park than the brilliant carriages in the 'Row.' You see I was not born to it, Lord Carruthers, and it is all new to a girl in the middle class of life. My father was an officer, it is true, but he was a poor man; and, moreover, he and my mother were not happy together, and they parted; so I really never saw him. They were both too proud ever to seek a reunion. Of course each thought the other to blame. It always is so in domestic troubles; I am sure."

"And always will be; but it was sad for you."

"Yes. We had rather a bad time of it. My mother's family were rich, but they lost all their money, and during my girlhood we were very poor; in fact, my dear mother really worked herself to death. My father was Lord Lynestone's private secretary for many years, and when he died he begged his lordship to seek us out, and befriend us. You know how he came to marry me; she ended, with a smile, and a bright upward glance.

"I am certain of one thing," he answered earnestly.

"And that is?"

"That he never regretted it," and once again silence reigned.

"I hope I am not in your way," he said at length, "but I promised the Duchess to remain 'on guard' until her return."

"On the other hand, I fear I am wasting your valuable time," she returned, "but I appreciate being looked after. I can assure you."

"Then I will remain without hesitation, the more pleased to have your companionship, knowing that daily calls me away this afternoon."

"So soon?" she asked, with an evident look of disappointment.

"Yes; we must not always consider our own pleasure, you know, and we shall meet again at Lynestone."

"I am very glad," she said; then suddenly looking up, she asked, if he minded children.

"No, I am very fond of them," he answered truthfully.

"Perhaps you won't object to my boy's company too," she laughed; "for I promised to have him down to sit with me, and I never like to break my word to him."

"Quite right," said his lordship, rising. "May I ring the bell for you to order him to be brought downstairs?"

"Will you? Thank you very much."

So when the Duchess returned at a quarter to two, she looked in upon a very pretty picture.

The little fellow was seated comfortably upon Lord Carruthers's knee, holding his hand confidently, and his blue eyes upturned to his kindly face, listening to some wonderful fairy tale which he was inventing or repeating for his amusement, while the young Countess paused in her work to listen too, scarcely less interested than the child.

"A pretty picture of home life," cried the Duchess. Fact had spoiled Fiction.

The thread of the story was broken; they all three had to return from fairy land to every day life.

Lady Lynestone sighed.

"Is that all?" asked the boy.

"Not quite, I must kiss you," said his lordship, stooping over him.

"Yes! for his pretty mother," thought the woman of the world, with a smile deepening about her lips.

"Well, Lord Carruthers, you have been faithful to your trust?" she laughed.

"He has, indeed," said the Countess, earnestly, putting away her work. "Oh! my dear friend, I can't think what I should have done without him; he has been so good to me!"

"I am glad you have earned such a character," said her Grace, turning to Lord Carruthers.

"You can't think how that wretched Marchese insulted me, and tried to frighten me into marrying him, and goodness knows what might have happened, but for Lord Carruthers!"

"Most gallant champion of dames, relate your deeds," said her Grace, tragically.

"There is very little to relate," returned his lordship, with a smile. "I accidentally found out that the man was laying a plot to entrap Lady Lynestons, and determined to unmask him—that is all!"

"And well he succeeded!" struck in Lady Lynestons, warmly. "My dear, he is, not a marquis at all; his name is Carlo Cavenci, nothing more."

"He was a singer in Naples when I was a lad, and when I visited the city with my tutor he was under a very black cloud. He was tried for robbing and murdering a French nobleman, to whose rooms he went to play cards."

"And he was acquitted?"

"He falsely proved an alibi," returned his lordship, gravely.

"And this creature has been an intimate guest in our house?" cried her Grace, indignantly. "The Duke really must be more careful in inquiring about people's antecedents. It does not do to take even a proud Roman marquis upon trust, you see, Lord Carruthers, I am more than indebted to you for your care of the Countess. What has become of that monster?"

"He has gone," returned his lordship, quietly.

"But he may return," she answered, with a look of alarm.

"Not he. I will make St. Ives an *courant* with all the facts of the case after luncheon. One word will be enough to send him off, if ever he should again venture into your society, but my opinion is that he will leave England before the day is out."

"Poor Rosamond! Fancy such a wretch trying to gain your love!" said her Grace indignantly. "It is atrocious!"

"More especially as his wife is now in London," continued his lordship, drily.

"Worse and worse," cried the Duchess, putting up her hands as though to ward off his words; "that surely is the agony point of your story. Don't tell me any more harrowing details. I don't think I could stand any more!"

"Well, I will spare you, but Lady Lynestons will have a good deal more to add in a quiet *à-tête*. You had better hear it all; the story is not half completed yet. After luncheon you may feel stronger and better able to stand up against it," he laughed, quizzically. "And, after all, it will come mild from the Countess's lips. Remember she had to hear it all from that Italian volcano, and give her all your best sympathy."

"And that I will," said her Grace, kindly. "There's the going, and my bonnet is still on."

The two ladies retired to the Duchess's boudoir after luncheon, while the gentlemen repaired to the smoking-room, and both the Countess and Lord Carruthers told their strange stories from beginning to end.

"A scoundrel of the blackest dye," cried the Duke, indignantly. "I hope he will never cross my path again. I am greatly obliged to you for your action in the matter in clearing him out of my house as you have done. To think of my wife and Lady Lynestons being in the company of such a ruffian makes my blood boil."

"My dear, what an escape!" cried the

Duchess, looking white and troubled. "I introduced you to the man, and I should never have forgiven myself if harm had come to you. Lord Carruthers behaved splendidly; fancy his remaining in the room all the time; but your knowing he was there, must have made you feel safe and secure."

"It did, indeed. I should have fainted if I had been alone."

"Poor girl. Well! it is all over now."

"Yes, that is indeed something to be thankful for; and Duchess, when are you coming to Lynestons, for I must really go home now? I have enjoyed my visit to you very much; but I have so many things to see to, which greatly need my attention."

"Very well, Rosamond. I believe in speeding the parting guest, as much as in welcoming the coming one."

"And Lord Carruthers is coming too," continued the Countess, with a rosy blush; "if you will bring him down."

The Duchess threw her arms around her friend's neck, and kissed her.

"Oh! is he?" she laughed. "Well, Rosy, you couldn't do better."

The blushes grew deeper and deeper.

"Oh! indeed no! there is nothing of that sort," she protested. "He has been very, very kind to me, that is all."

"Oh! that is all, small woman, is it?" said her Grace, laughing still. "Well, we shall see."

"Dear Duchess, indeed we are only friends," asserted the Countess, earnestly.

"Well, friends are very nice things, Rosy, when they are made of the right stuff! I wish you joy of your friendship. I will certainly bring Lord Carruthers down to Lynestons."

CHAPTER XXV.

LORD CARRUTHERS' LAST LOVE.

LORD CARRUTHERS started that afternoon for Warminster Towers, having telegraphed for a carriage to meet him at the station.

The following morning his first act was to go and see his old governess, Miss Wheeler, and to her he confided the whole story of poor Marie Paraviso, whom she willingly undertook to receive, and to carry out his lordship's charitable plans for.

Then he ordered his horses, and rode to the Rectory of Winasthorpe, and saw with a sense of chill that the house was deserted. Nevertheless, he knocked at the door, which was answered by one of the old servants, who gave him the details of Mr. Thorndyke's death, with honest tears in her eyes, and told him that Mrs. and Miss Thorndyke were now staying at Marsden Hall; so he mounted again and rode on.

Sir Richard was walking up and down his garden in the sunshine, with an unusual look of sadness upon his fine face. He took his watch from his pocket as his lordship drew rein beside him.

"Well timed, Carruthers!" he said, heartily. "Luncheon will be ready in five minutes, and you must join us. Lillian will be very pleased to see you, and we have friends with us who will give you a welcome too. The Thorndykes are here. We have lost the poor old Rectory; not so old either, but he's gone, and we shall never see his like in Winasthorpe again. I've given the living to Bob Lake; he has a good heart, and he knows Thorndyke's ways. I don't wish anything altered in the church or parish. It has been a terrible loss for the poor wife and daughter, and I venture to think Adela has felt it even more keenly than her mother; hers is a very intense nature, she feels acutely. Mrs. Thorndyke's is a more even temperament. You will find Adela greatly altered."

She was sitting alone in the drawing-room when Sir Richard ushered him in, and he acknowledged to himself that the Baroness's judgment had been correct.

The sparkle had died out of her eyes, but

there was a greater depth and intensity in their beauty. She was altered, etherealized, changed, but she was equally lovely.

There was no time for conversation, for luncheon was announced almost as soon as they entered the room, and Lillian and Mrs. Thorndyke joined them.

Lord Carruthers looked at Adela several times during the meal, with a strange uncertainty as to his feelings towards her. There was a deep and earnest pity for her in his great heart, but the old ecstatic thrill at being in her presence was wanting. He was very glad to see her—very; but there was no wild demonstration in his feeling towards her. He was more than sorry for her trouble. Her evident mental anguish touched him. He longed to comfort and help her, and he kept himself bravely up to the determination of once more offering her the shelter of his home.

When luncheon was over, he again found himself alone with her; it was Lillian's doing. She drew the others away, with the vague hope that Adela might be wise at last, and turn to a lover who had been so true and steadfast to her.

"Adela," said Lord Carruthers, coming straight to the point. "I have only lately heard of your sorrow, or I should have written to assure you of my deepest sympathy. I was among your good father's sincerest admirers."

"I am sure of it," she answered, with trembling lips. "I felt certain you did not know; you were always so kind and thoughtful!"

"I wish you would let me be kind to you, dear girl," he answered, tenderly; but he was quiet and calm, and he wondered at himself.

His first offer to her had been made in so very different a manner and spirit. If she accepted him, he should be very fond of her, and very good to her, but the passion she had for years inspired had worn itself out.

She looked up at him inquiringly. To her the question of love had been settled between them, and she did not catch his meaning.

"Adela," he continued. "You are looking sad; let me comfort you, my dear. Can you not now make up your mind to share my home? I conclude you will have to leave your old one. I have become older, and more staid in these days. I do not expect anything very startling in the shape of happiness to come my way. When once the first bright dream fades, we have to be content with something more prosaic; but, Adela, I think we might be very happy together if you will try, and I need not say I want to take care of your mother too."

"This is very kind of you, Lord Carruthers," she answered, with a faint smile. "Most kind."

"Kind! Why?"

She had found him out. She knew that the old ring had left his voice.

"Because you no longer love me," she said bravely. "and you are willing to make me your wife, simply to take care of me for the sake of the old love, which is now dead."

"Adela, my dear, you pain me," he said, with a gathering certainty that she was right. Indeed I wish you to be my wife.

"Yes! It was for your own sake once; now it is for mine, and mine alone. My kind generous friend, had it been ever so much for yours, my answer must have been the same. I love another: and Lord Carruthers, if you told me the truth, so do you! Naught but that could have changed you so completely."

"Am I changed, Adela?" he asked, with a strange mistrust of himself. "If I am, I do not know it; I have not realized the fact."

"No? then you soon will! My friend, may you be very, very happy!"

"Have you quite decided against me?" he asked gravely.

"Quite!"

"The third time then has not proved lucky."

"Yes, it has. You are going to be very happy."

"And you?"
Tears started to her eyes.
"Do not think about me," she answered,
"I shall do very well."

Then he went away, and left her alone, but not before they had clasped hands as real friends once more.

She felt a little more desolate when he was gone, thinking what a happy wife she might have been if only she had loved him.

And he?
He knew not whether to be glad or sorry, at her refusal.

Had she accepted him, when her heart was given to another, he could have looked for little happiness as her husband; and yet he longed to protect and cherish her—the chivalry in his nature spoke for her.

So he rode back to his home, and somehow it had never looked so cold and dull to him, the summer sunshine seemed a mockery, he felt so very much alone.

He remained some days at the Towers, transacting business connected with the estate, which required his attention, and then he returned to town, taking Miss Wheeler with him; and having conducted her to the quiet unpretentious street where Signora Cavenci was lodging, he introduced the ladies to each other, and having given the former carte blanche, to obtain whatever she thought necessary for the comfort of his protégée, he went away, and left them alone together.

In a few days Miss Wheeler had fitted up Marie with such things as she required, and they drove off to the station in a cab, to the intense regret of Mrs. Rawlins, who declared she never before had had a lodger who gave so little trouble.

"She's a gentle creature!" she murmured, as the fly rumbled out of sight; "and I wish I could have kept her here, and that I do; but there, I must not be selfish," and she leisurely hung the card again up in her window, to signify to the public that her lodgings were to let.

Lord Carruthers called upon the Duchess of St. Ives, and found her at home, but Lady Lynestone had left her.

"I am going to visit her next week," said her Grace, in answer to his inquiries for the Countess, "and I understand you are to accompany me to Lynestone?"

"Thank you, if I should not be in the way."

"Not in the least; I shall be glad of your escort. The Duke is deeply involved in politics, and has declined to go with me; but what on earth you will find to do down there puzzles me. Shooting has not begun, or you would have found the covers of Lynestone good, I am told."

"Lady Lynestone has promised me some fishing," he laughed; "and I suppose it has never struck you that I shall be pleased to escort the ladies in their walks and rides and drives. You will find me a very domesticated man, I assure you, Duchess."

"A carpet knight, eh! Well. I shall not object to your company, and I daresay the Countess will manage to put up with it too; and then you can nurse the boy," she added, mischievously. "I hope you have a good store of those interesting tales, one of which I so cruelly broke in two."

"Oh! we can finish it another time," he returned, smiling. "Perhaps you will kindly let me know the day and hour you start?"

"I can tell you that now, if you don't object to the trouble of looking out the trains."

"Not in the least, if you have a Bradshaw."

"Would you mind ringing for it?" she asked; and so they made all arrangements to leave town that day week.

Lynestone was bathed in a flood of golden sunshine as Lord Carruthers first saw it, and the breeze and sun combined in making the lake one blaze of bright scintillating wavelets, like diamonds.

The old trees were still fresh and green and beautiful. The gentle deer grazed the tender

grass fearlessly, for they were all pets of the Countess, and came to her to be fed with bread.

She was standing upon the massive steps, under the colossal portico, waiting to receive them.

"You see I cannot be conventional," she said, giving a hand to each of her guests. "Welcome! right welcome to Lynestone!"

"We have left conventional in London, Rose, and have come to enjoy ourselves in the country," laughed the Duchess. "I begin to feel quite young already, without my grave husband and my children. It is to be hoped the freedom of Lynestone won't make me too skittish, my dear, but I really feel up to any mischief at the present time. Cannot you find any for me to do?"

Lady Lynestone laughed.

"What have you done with your dignity, Duchess? I have heard you called the most dignified woman in society?"

"Just so, dear. I keep it for society. The Duke likes it, because he is considerably older than I am, but now I have packed it up with my coronet. I shall not want either while I am at Lynestone," and she gave the Countess a hearty hug.

"Has she been like this all the way down?" asked Lady Lynestone, smiling up at Lord Carruthers. "If so you must have had a lively journey."

"No; it must be the effect of this crisp, clear air. It has only just come on, I assure you, and I think it must be contagious, for, do you know, I feel very much like it myself; and yet when I was down at Warminster Towers there seemed to be no gladness in the sunshine," he answered, laughing.

"My dear," said the Duchess, "do you ride?"

"I used to do so, before—before—"

"I understand."

"I have not since then."

"Then you must commence again tomorrow. The Duke does not allow me to ride. He says my life is too valuable with my young family, but I am going to begin tomorrow with you. I have brought down my habit with me, and shall not I enjoy a scamper once more! It will be like old times!"

"But, dear Duchess, if the Duke heard of it, would he not be vexed?"

"Now, Rose, I didn't expect preaches—preaches from you. Of course he would, but he would get over it. I can look so wonderfully pathetic, if he is angry. He soon melts; but he won't hear of it unless I tell him myself, which is more than likely to happen in a soft moment, if he is unusually nice!"

"I am glad you mean to tell him," replied the Countess. "I should enjoy it above all things!"

"And so should I," said Lord Carruthers. So the rides began the very next day.

But it was only a ruse of the Duchess's to throw her friends together, and as often as not she declined at the last moment to accompany them.

She was loyal as loyal could be to the Duke, and he was fully kept acquainted with her daily actions in letters, which, if not voluminous, were full of matter and point, with a quaint vein of humour running through them.

She put herself to actual inconvenience to remain for a long visit at Lynestone, feeling that when she left Lord Carruthers must do so too, and she showed no inclination to say farewell; but it came at last.

The Duke wrote that he could spare her no longer, and the walks and the rides, the fairy tales, and the summer evenings spent in the beautiful old garden must be brought to a close.

It was the last day that they were to spend there, and their visit had lasted a month—a bright and happy month.

It had passed like a pleasant dream to Lord Carruthers. Each day he grew more conscious of the beauty and charms of Lady Lynestone.

She and the Duchess were strolling along arm-in arm, and he was walking beside them, with a cigar in his hand, but he had forgotten to light it.

Summer was waning, the evenings were closing in.

The gloaming was creeping on, and the stars were beginning to glisten in the sky like bayonet points.

"It grows chilly," said the Duchess, with a pretended shiver. "I shall fetch a wrap."

"Let me get you one," said her hostess, but her Grace would not hear of it, and an entreating look from Lord Carruthers settled the question.

"It is his last chance for the present," soliloquized the Duchess, as she turned, before entering the mansion, to look after them. "And he has not the sense I give him credit for, if he loses the opportunity."

She laughed as she settled herself in the drawing-room, by the soft light of a reading-lamp, and took up the novel which lay open on the table.

"It will take me an hour to finish," she continued, smiling still. "He ought to manage it in that time. Well she will make him a loving little wife, and he—he's the nicest man I know, except the Duke, of course," she added mentally, and was soon deep in the love-story before her.

"Lady Lynestone, I was afraid you were going to run away," said Lord Carruthers; "this is our last evening together, you know, and I do not want to lose you for ever such a little time."

She gave him no answer, but she looked up at him with a smile.

"Shall you be sorry when I leave you?" he asked, drawing very near to her.

"Very," she answered, in a low voice; "the old place will seem sad and lonely when you and the Duchess are gone."

"Rosamond," he said, taking possession of her hand; "my own home is utterly desolate. What is a home with no beloved companion to share it? Why should we live apart? I love you earnestly and truly, as I never expected to love again!"

"Again?" she repeated, in surprise.

"Yes! it is only right you should know the truth."

"No, thou art not my first love," he quoted, I had loved before we met;
And the memory of that early dream,
Is pleasant to me yet.
But then thou art my last love,
My dearest and my best;
My heart but shed its outer leaves,
To give thee all the rest."

I loved once, very, very dearly, but my was not reciprocated, and is now a thin the past."

"Was it Adela?" she asked shyly.

"Yes, it was Adela."

"Are you sure she does not care for you?"

"Quite."

She breathed more freely. This man had become so much to her, that she felt how hard it would be to give him up even to one she cared for as she did for Adela Thorndyke.

"I am glad," she said, simply.

His arm crept about her, the darkness was deepening, and the stars were twinkling overhead.

"Rosamond, may I come back?" he asked tenderly. "I never knew what a lonely thing life was till I felt the miss of you when we parted in town. My darling, if not my first, you are my last dear, dear love, and I must transplant you to my home!"

"Do you want me to leave Lynestone?" she asked, wistfully.

"No, it would not be fair to expect that! Could we not spend half our time here, and half at Warminster Towers?"

She nestled a little closer to his side.

"Rose, you do love me, do you not?" he asked, earnestly, stopping to gaze upon her fair face in the dusk.

"With all my heart," she answered, in a

low, soft whisper. "Oh, Reginald! I know now that you are my first and last love. I was very fond of dear Lord Lynstone—he was so good to me; but I loved him as the father I had never known, and mourned him truly—but oh! my dear, it was not love. I did not know it then, but I know it now."

"Thank Heaven!" he murmured, and gathered her closely to his breast.

"Do you know what has kept me silent all this month, Rose? It was no doubt of my feelings for you, but a dread lest you still loved your dead lord, and that I should have the shadow, and not the reality, of your affection."

"You need have no fear, love," she whispered. "I am all your own, and I am so, so happy."

"My love, my dear, dear love!" he murmured, and pressed his lips to hers in a fervent, loving kiss.

"They married in the end, of course," said the Duchess to herself, as she tossed down the third volume; "they always do," and she looked up to see Lord Carruthers and the Countess before her arm-in-arm.

"Hallo!" she laughed, "so it is settled. You have been so long about it I began to think I must have made a mistake; but I wish you both every joy. May Lord Carruthers make you as good as husband as the Duke has been to me, my little Rosamond, and you will be a happy woman."

(To be continued.)

IVY'S PERIL.

—o—

CHAPTER VI.

PAUL BERESFORD was not a man of extravagant habits. He had never known the pressure of poverty, for though his father had been unable to leave him a fortune he had given him, besides a finished education, practical and business-like habits, so that he was never likely to be in want of employment.

In addition to this Paul inherited by his father's will an excellent library, a small collection of art treasures, and about five hundred pounds in the bank.

The man whose last five-and-twenty years of life had been spent in adoration of his dead wife's memory was not likely to make many friends.

Guy Beresford was respected by all the poor in the district where he lived, but most Englishmen had forgotten the brilliant scholar who was once the pride of his college. Of the many comrades who had witnessed Guy's triumphs there was only one with whom the grave, sorrow-stricken widower had cared to keep up any attempt at intimacy.

Mr. Thomas Griffiths, of the Inner Temple, solicitor, was as great a contrast to Paul's father as could well have been found. The one spent his life practically in making money, and cared for no home ties; the other was utterly reckless as regarded pecuniary honours, and having made a home and lost its queen spent the rest of his days in mourning her.

Still, though they only corresponded once a year and met at still rarer intervals, the man of law in his musty chambers, and the lonely mourner in the vine-covered Italian home, were friends.

This being so, it is astonishing that Paul and Mr. Griffiths should never have been introduced to each other until the former came to England after his father's death.

He called then in the Temple, heard the will which gave him all the testator had to leave, and received a warmer greeting than he had expected.

Mr. Griffiths at once offered house-room to the library and the art collection. He insisted

that a large empty room was entirely at their service.

Then he gave his friend's son much well-meant advice, and parted from him with the oracular statement that the good fortune his father had missed might come to him.

Mr. Beresford paid no particular heed to the wish. He interpreted it in its vaguest sense—that as his father had gained neither riches, fame, or success, all these might be his if he worked for them, and he really went to work with very ambitious notions.

For two years he dreamed of sudden glory; then he became Mr. White's secretary, and from that point his career is known to us.

But all through those two years, though he worked sufficiently hard to get them, Paul was never without those little comforts which, to my mind, make the difference between life and existence.

He never needed to deny himself ordinary refinements, and so, when he came to London as Ivy Carew's fiancé and the present possessor of three hundred a year, he sought out very pleasant chambers in Cecil-street, Strand, though, at Mr. Griffiths' advice, he only took them by the week.

"There's no knowing what may happen," said the lawyer, meaningly. "There may come a radical change in your circumstances, young man."

Paul smiled. He would have liked to tell the lawyer of his engagement, but Sir John's only stipulation had been that the betrothal should be kept secret until the wedding-day was fixed, so the young lover could only smile and think to himself the "radical change" was, perhaps, nearer than Mr. Griffiths had any idea of.

The lawyer did not seem particularly elated by Paul's position at the "Security." He declared it was a good company enough; but the managers were crotchety, and apt to treat their officials with scant courtesy.

"I shall be all right, I think," observed Paul. "For one thing, I don't mean to stay with them over a year; and for another, Mr. White got me the post, and he is a personal friend of the directors."

"I don't think that's particularly to his credit."

"Why?" exclaimed Paul, in consternation. "What can you mean? Aren't they respectable?"

"Perfectly; only when the company had not long been started, to launch it the directors made one or two extraordinary concessions to the public. I remember one man told me it was well-named the 'Security,' since it offered perfect safety to murderers. There was a strong feeling its regulations were risky; but I think it is dying out now, and the office itself has a good name, though the directors have never quite been forgiven."

"But what did they do?"

"They made an insurance policy payable if death occurred the very day after the first premium had been paid. The will holds good still. Say you are penniless, and you have a wife, besides half-a-dozen children. Insure your life for five thousand in the 'Security' to-day, commit suicide to-morrow, and the money's available for your family."

"It seems like putting a premium on crime."

"It does. But as a fact I never heard of a case of suicide among the company's customers. I suppose when people are so down on their luck as to want to make away with themselves, they've no heart to think of insuring their lives. Still, Paul, I'm glad you're only going to be there a short time. I don't approve of changes; but though there's nothing to take hold of, I don't really like the reputation of the 'Security,' and I shouldn't care for your father's son to pass the best part of his life in their office."

This accusation came back to Paul with strange force, as he found a letter, under the official seal, on his breakfast-table. He knew two of the directors had been in town the day before, and that the manager had been shut

up with them for over an hour; but what that could possibly have to do with him in his private capacity he had no idea.

And the note did not tell him much. It merely said he would be desired to leave London on urgent official business; therefore would be good enough to take his portmanteau to King William-street when he repaired there.

"What a nuisance!" was Mr. Beresford's reflection. "Why, I may be away a week, and Ivy here in London! I begin to wish I had remained George White's private secretary, and never transferred my services to the 'Security.'"

But over head and ears in love, as he certainly was, Paul had the sense to know there was nothing he could take umbrage at in the request. Before he signed his agreement with the company, he had seen a clause by which he consented to leave London for them if their interests so demanded. His salary would be increased, and his travelling expenses paid, but these details were no compensation. Escape was out of the question. He could not possibly say to the directors,—"I am engaged to be married, and I can't leave my lady love!"

"Perhaps it will only take three days," ruminated poor Mr. Beresford. "Anyway, I must see Ivy before I go."

He was at the office before his time, and received the compliments of the directors on his dispatch. Then the bombshell broke. They required him to go to Edinburgh at once; the gentleman in charge of the branch there was seriously ill, and Mr. Beresford was to fill his place.

"You had better go by the twelve o'clock express," said the elder director, blandly. "You have two hours before you; ample time to reach King's-cross, and then lunch."

Ample, indeed, for both purposes, but hardly a liberal allowance for a lover's farewell, specially if that has to be said at the West-end, and he is in the city.

Paul hired the fleetest hansom he could find, promised the driver double fare if he was quick, and rattle down to Coningsby-street in no time.

Alas! the ladies were out, and no one knew accurately when they would return. Poor young man! He waited until his chances of catching the twelve o'clock train were well-nigh jeopardized; then he left a disconsolate note of farewell, and rattled back to King's Cross to commence the most distasteful journey of his life.

And when he reached Edinburgh, and had put in an appearance at the "Security" office, all hope of getting away in three days or even a week forsook him.

The man, whose place he had come to fill, was dangerously ill. His subordinates were mere boys, and in his anxiety to keep the business together he had struggled against his illness, and neglected all precautions.

One look at Paul, one sight of his credentials, and sure his work was in good hands, he succumbed to the entreaties of wife and doctor, and went to bed.

Mrs. Campbell begged Paul to make their house his head-quarters—at any rate, for the present.

She was a pretty, dark-eyed girl, evidently in a very early state of her married life. Evidently she regarded Mr. Beresford as a species of good angel sent to relieve her husband of all care; and the way she talked of his being able at last to give up and take a thorough rest convinced poor Mr. Beresford she counted on his taking Mr. Campbell's place for a month or even longer.

A good night's rest, and he was ready for work. He found the place he had come to fill no sinecure. There was work enough in the office for four intelligent men, and he was single-handed, except for two very juvenile clerks.

It dawned on Paul he was to know more of positive toil than he had ever done before. The office hours were the same as in London; but

here he had to take the books home with him, and work at them in the evening, or he could never have made any way at all.

"Of course he wrote to Ivy, and told her of his grief at having to leave her without a word of farewell; and Ivy wrote back that Mr. Campbell must make haste and get well, for she really could not spare him long. But the days passed on, and still Mr. Campbell kept his bed; and the office in King William-street showed no signs of sending anyone to relieve Paul Beresford.

"He wrote to Ivy constantly, and she answered him as regularly, but after the first fortnight there grew a strange constraint in her letters.

"It seemed to Paul she was trying to keep something back. In vain he read and re-read the girlish epistles. There was nothing he could take hold of, and yet "reading between the lines" he felt the letters were not Ivy's own natural style. She was hiding something.

"But what?

"Not unhappiness. She never failed to say that Mrs. Austin was kindness itself, and that Mr. White—whose business in Spain had been far shorter than poor Beresford's in Scotland—was always trying to amuse her. Not dullness; there was always a long list of places she had been to and people who had seen, but yet the fact remained the letters were strangely unlike Ivy.

"Christmas fell upon a Thursday, and Paul had cherished great hopes of a trip to England. "Surely he could leave on Wednesday, and stay over Sunday in the South. He had made his plans when a letter from Ivy told him Mrs. Austin proposed to spend Christmas in the Isle of Wight.

"It completely upset Paul's plans. By traveling night all he could have managed to reach London on Christmas Day. The office, in a truly uncharitable spirit, insisted on his being at his post on the Saturday, so that even if Mrs. Austin had inquired, as she ought to have done, in Coningsby-street, a day and a half would have been the extent of his happiness with Ivy; but the extra journey to the Isle of Wight was quite out of the question. He would have arrived late on Christmas night, and had to start before daybreak the next morning.

"Perhaps his disappointment betrayed itself in his letter; for Ivy's answer had a great strain running through it. She seemed to think, as he would so soon be free from all connection with the "Security," he need not inflict such disappointment on himself and her in the company's service. She could not understand that, to his delicate sense of honour, so long as he received their money, he was bound to do his best for them, even if he knew he should leave them the next week.

"It was not a quarrel, rather a coldness between the lovers; it was just the tiniest little rift within the lute, just the slightest marring of the perfect harmony in thought and feeling that had been between them; and then, with the first months of the New Year, Ivy's letters grew fewer and shorter. Loving and tender they were, yet brief even to abruptness; and she never by any chance alluded to Paul's answers, never replied to the questions he asked her, and at last one of these strange letters had a stranger postmark.

"Are you getting tired of me, dear?"

"It was the beginning of February now; Paul had been away from London two months. Mr. Campbell was quite restored to health, and he now daily expected his recall. But Ivy's question had troubled him. Why should she have asked it unless the wish was father to the thought? Had she seen anyone she preferred to him; and, to excuse her own fickleness, did she, perchance, hope he was getting tired of her?

"Pretty Mrs. Campbell was quite concerned at the change in her visitor (for she and her husband had insisted on Paul's remaining their guest); and one evening when Mr. Campbell had gone to lie down, and her baby was in bed,

she made a desperate plunge, and asked Mr. Beresford point-blank if he had had bad news.

"She was a dear little thing, devoted to her husband and her long-robbed baby, but yet with plenty of interest left for other's troubles. She had taken a fancy to Paul; she regarded his arrival as having saved her Willie's life, and there was nothing in the world she would not have done to help him.

"No," said Mr. Beresford, gravely. "Not bad news exactly; only—"

"Only there's someone in the south who thinks you've been away from her long enough; is that it, Mr. Beresford?"

"I was wondering whether she did not mean I had better stay away altogether."

Bessie looked at him, and understood.

"It's just a lovers' quarrel."

"We haven't quarrelled!"

"She wants you back, and thinks you might make more haste. She doesn't know how you've been tied here."

Her sympathy was irresistible. Paul opened his heart, and told the little lady all he could; how her letters had grown so few and short; how his darling was a great heiress, and he a plain worker in life's line. What did Mrs. Campbell think? Was Ivy repenting her promise? Did she want him to give her back her freedom?

"I should like to shake you!" said little Mrs. Campbell, ferociously. "What right have you to think such wicked things?"

"It looks like it!"

"It doesn't!"

It was delightful to have his gloomy fancies contradicted; but they were too rooted to give way all at once.

"I should have seen her at Christmas if only she had been reasonable, and stayed in London. What caprice could take her to the Isle of Wight? It must have been on purpose to avoid me!"

"Nonsense!"

"It seems like it."

"You deserve a scolding! You say yourself she is staying with strangers—people in no ways related to her—not even very old friends. Do you suppose a young girl would dictate to her hostess where to spend Christmas?"

"But Mrs. Austin would do nothing against Ivy's wishes."

"How long had you been engaged at Christmas, pray?"

"Two months."

"And you think the child had got used to it sufficiently to talk about her affection!"

"Why not?"

"She is a girl, and girls don't talk; they fret. You don't suppose when I was engaged to Willie I could talk about him to strangers, and tell anyone I couldn't go anywhere they wanted because it would lose me a sight of him. I think your Ivy much too good for you!"

"She is, indeed; but—"

"And if you let her see you think yourself injured, of course her letters have grown fewer and shorter."

"I haven't."

"Are you sure?"

"I never meant to."

"Maybe you've done it without the meaning. Well, you will soon be going south; and then you can put things straight. I believe you've fancied yourself quite miserable."

"I feel wretched."

Mrs. Campbell grew just a little graver.

"You say her letters are really altered?"

"Undeniably. Why?"

"Nothing."

"I am sure you had a reason for asking."

"I had."

"Tell it me."

"I don't like to."

"You will distress me by refusing."

"It may be all my mistake, and then I shall have alarmed you foolishly; but as I see you mean me to give in I will tell you. I often take in the letters, and always sort them;

so you see, without being inquisitive or prying, I couldn't help knowing your chief correspondent was lady, and I guessed you were going to marry her."

"You guessed quite right."

"Well, the last month the letters have been fewer—much fewer."

"Just what I said," interrupted Paul. "You see you have remarked it yourself."

Bessie hurried on. Even if her words pained him it was best he should hear them; they might at least substitute another fear for the one he had suffered to approach him.

"I had a theory of my own to explain why the letters were so few. The writing has altered too; it is quite changed from the pretty flowing hand it used to be. When I saw you dull and troubled I felt sure my guess was right, and dullness had seized on your correspondent."

"Illness!"

"Now, don't let me frighten you."

"She never said a word about being ill."

"Of course not; she would not make you anxious. I suppose you keep her letters?"

"I keep them!" cried Paul indignantly. "Do you think I am a heartless monster, Mrs. Campbell? Of course I keep them."

"Then when you go upstairs to-night compare the letter you had this morning—I won't say with those you have had lately, but with the first you received since you came!"

Paul took her hand.

"It will be a cruel blow if you are right, but not so cruel as what I feared."

"You are going into the other extreme, Mr. Beresford. I never meant seriously ill; the sight of you and happiness will soon put things to rights. Perhaps Miss Ivy would say other letters had been few and short lately, besides hers."

Paul winced.

"Don't be afraid of losing her," said the happy young wife, gently, "and don't be afraid of telling her that you love her. I think why so many marriages turn out sadly is because husbands get into a way of letting their wives take their love for granted."

"I am sure Mrs. Campbell doesn't."

She smiled brightly.

"We married on next to nothing, and people said we were very foolish; we were desperately in love too, and kind friends told us house-keeping on small means would soon wear that away; there was nothing like poverty, they said, for taking the gilt off the gingerbread. That is more than a year ago, Mr. Beresford, and I don't quite know what they meant by the gingerbread; but if the expression stood for our life, love gilds it just as much now as it did on our wedding-day."

"I am sure of that."

"I am giving you quite a lecture. Willie says I am a dreadful chatter-box."

"I wish you knew Ivy."

"I wish I did. You will bring her to see me some day?"

"Indeed I will."

"And remember, you are not to fancy her at death's door because of my little suggestion; but you are to be very kind and gentle to her because she loves you, and she has no mother."

"I wish she was staying with you now."

"Don't you like the people she is with, or can't you forgive them for taking her to the Isle of Wight?"

Paul hesitated.

"They are kindness and hospitality itself. I could not find a fault with either of them, and yet—"

"Don't trouble to explain," said Bessie Campbell. "Is not this what you mean?"

"I do not like you, Dr. Bell. The reason why I cannot tell."

He smiled.

"Something like it."

"I know just what you feel," said Mrs. Campbell, quaintly. "There is a man who comes to see Willie on business sometimes who always makes me shudder. He has some

great influence with the directors, and he has been here twice. Willie brought him into lunch. Do you know I had never seen him, never heard of him before, and yet when he shook hands with me I felt a cold shudder creep over me?"

"That is terrible. Now, my experiences of Mr. White and his sister are not so bad as that. I simply cannot like them."

"Mr. White!" Bessie Campbell spoke quite eagerly. "Is he a millionaire? Is his Christian name George?"

"Yes, to both questions."

"How very strange!"

"What is?"

"Why he is my little aunt, the very woman I was telling you of whom I am so afraid!"

She shivered then, even as she spoke.

"It must be a mutual sympathy," said Bessie. "The strangest thing is, I myself shared it once."

"Then how could you leave her in his clutches?"

Paul felt this a little unfair.

"I could not help myself; her uncle selected Mr. White's sister as Ivy's guardian during his absence in Australia. Neither she nor I were consulted."

"When will he be home?"

"In two or three months."

"And you are expecting your uncle, isn't it?"

Mr. Bessie, then it is rather very much to you if you lose your position and security?"

"I should not like to lose it under any circumstances, but I am not sure."

She sighed.

"Well, your relatives are sure to come soon; otherwise I should advise you to get all prudent consideration made, and start for London tomorrow."

"Then you think he is very ill?"

"I think that I should be very ill if my health failed when I was that man's guest. I have a horror of him!"

"And yet he is not a bad-looking man," said Mrs. Campbell sighed.

"I don't think men ever have such things as instincts. When I saw Mr. White I felt he was a bad man; I can't explain what told me, only I knew it. Willie has tried again and again to persuade me Mr. White is a most worthy Christian and philanthropist. Now, generally I believe every word my husband says; but I can't believe him in this."

Bessie looked perplexed.

"I wish her uncle and aunt had never left her."

"I am going to bed now," said Mrs. Campbell, "and I shall send Willie to have one cigar. Don't keep him up late, please; and, Mr. Bessie, you can trust my husband with any secret."

Paul felt that already. He had taken a great fancy to the quiet, reserved man, who was such a contrast to his bright, vivacious little wife.

For some little while the two smoked in silence, then Bessie said,—

"Your wife tells me you know George White, the famous millionaire."

"I have met him twice."

"I wish you would tell me your true opinion of him."

Mr. Campbell smiled.

"Bessie has been setting you to ask this? I know she has a perfect horror of the man. We are forced to meet him sometimes, and so I don't let her think I share her opinion of him lest his visits should really alarm her."

"Then you don't like him?"

"I don't."

"But why?"

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"Oh, no."

The Scotsman looked into the fire.

"I don't believe in the presentiments my little wife is so fond of; but for all that she's right about White. He's a bad man."

"But how?"

Mr. Campbell shrugged his shoulders.

"Bessie never saw him till lately. I met him ten years ago. He was then a penniless

adventurer. I don't mean to say a man must be a knave because he rises from beggary to be a millionaire; but when with his change of fortune he changes also his name, his appearance, and his relations, I judge there must be some crime in his past life he desires to hide."

Bessie put one hand on his friend's arm. "Help me," he half cried, half whispered.

"The girl I love more than life—who will, I hope, soon be my wife—is now that man's guest. Her only relations are in Australia, and she is utterly at his mercy."

The Scot smoked on in perfect silence.

"Help me," again pleaded Paul. "I have a wife of your own. Surely you understand the matter is life and death to me?"

Mr. Campbell removed his pipe.

"Is the young lady rich?"

"She will be when she comes of age, in about sixteen months."

"Has she powerful friends?"

"Her uncle is a baronet of large fortune."

"Then you need not distress yourself. George White is a coward at heart (unless he has changed his name with his name). He would not dare to figure any one with friends able to avenge it; and as your fiancée is a minor, even if he drew her into any worthless speculation, she would really lose nothing."

"Your opinion of him is pretty full?"

"As bad as it could be; only I won't let Bessie know it. Of course he has got a reputation for probity and commercial honesty, and all that. I believe he has kept pretty straight lately, but the last remains ten years ago he was a penniless vagrant. If he had simply got on by fair means, even by luck, he needn't have changed his whole appearance? An altered name would have been enough. I assure you, when I first met him here I was astonished."

"But you recognised him?"

"By a fluke. He always had a trick of biting his lips. I have seen him do it till the blood came. Look at Mr. White's lips; they are almost as thick as a negro's. Ask any one, and he will tell you the result of perpetual biting or moistening the lips is to make them thick and unwieldy."

"It is a small thing to go on."

"Is it? Have you ever noticed his eyes?"

"They are too light for the rest of his face. Hair, brows, and skin are all intensely dark; the eyes alone indicate fair origin."

"Art has advanced a great deal," said the Scot composedly; "but it is not yet possible to dye your eyes—at least I think not."

Paul sighed.

"Have I convinced you?" asked Mr. Campbell.

"I can hardly say convinced; I have always had stray doubts of George White. If only Sir John had left Ivy in other hands!"

"She will be quite safe," reassuringly. "I can say that fearlessly. George White is a born coward; and, besides, if he worships anything it is rank and wealth. A baronet's niece and an heiress will be perfectly free from danger. Still, if the young lady were my fiancée—"

He stopped. Paul looked at him imploringly.

"Do go on."

"Well, it's not particularly proper advice for the head of a family to give, but if my fiancée were under George White's roof I should speedily move her to mine."

"But how?"

The other laughed.

"I thought I should shock you. Marry her, of course."

"But she is a minor?"

"Even so the marriage is legal, unless forbidden by the guardians. Since you say they are in Australia they're hardly likely to appear to forbid the banns."

Paul groaned.

"If only she had not that miserable money I'd take your advice."

"But as it is you can't risk losing that!"

"Sir!" Paul's face was ablaze with indignation. "My only fear is that if I married her, as you suggest, there being no settlements, her uncle might think I hurried on the match to keep the disposal of her fortune in my own hands."

"You could soon disprove that."

"How?"

"You have no debts?"

"Not a penny."

"Then marry your bride one day, and give back her fortune to be settled on her the next. The thing's simple enough."

Paul looked into the fire.

"Mr. Campbell," he said, gravely, "if only Ivy will come to me like that I will make her my wife within a week of my return to London. I can't describe it to you; but all you have told me of the man White finds an echo in my own heart. I only wish Ivy's uncle did not believe in him so thoroughly."

"Refer the matter to me. I have given you no particulars, because I don't want to betray the man's past needlessly; but if your fiancée's guardian at all resents your summary actions send him to me, and I'll tell him that about his millionaire which will make him shudder to think he ever touched the man's hand."

Mrs. Campbell's voice was heard, asking if they knew the time. Paul's conscience made him; he had kept the invalid up to well-nigh midnight.

"No apologies!" said Campbell, mildly.

"It's not so long since I was in your position, and I'm quite sure if I had thought Bessie was in any danger I should have kept a dozen people up to try and help me save her."

He wrung Paul's hand, and they parted for the night. Mr. Bessie went to his own room; but though the fire burnt brightly, and the gas gave a cheerful light, no words will convey the hard, desolate sense of trouble that seemed to Paul to pervade the whole of the little room.

Mrs. Campbell had done him one good service—all his doubts of Ivy had fled. Comparing her first letter with her last he saw only too plainly the change in her writing, and marvelled that he had never noticed it before.

Of course, Bessie's explanation was the right one—his darling had been ill. But Paul remembered her own words, that she had never been ill in her life, and he found it difficult to think of any malady that could have wrought such havoc as to change her very writing.

Reading the letters again one by one the sadness of the later ones touched him, specially also the fact that they contained no single allusion to his own.

Could it be that Mr. White had suppressed his loving rhapsodies?

Poor Paul! There came back to him all the circumstances of his acquaintance with George White.

He remembered how, when he first went to Meadow View, the millionaire had charged him to discover whether Miss Carew were engaged, and if she had fair health. He knew from Lady Fortescue it was at Mr. White's suggestion Ivy's marriage was deferred till summer.

Although the Australian trip had been determined by Cousin Alexander's letter, the first mention of it had been bruited some days before by Mr. White.

"Heaven forgive me if I wrong him," sighed Paul; "but it looks to me as if he had acted all through with but one object—to defer our marriage, if not to put it off entirely. But what can be his object? If he had wanted my darling for himself he would surely have paid her attentions in those long days when my poverty kept me silent. From his first meeting with Ivy his manner to her has been that of a fatherly friend, never of a lover! That he is against my hopes, and would rob me of my darling I firmly believe; but I cannot see his object, for I am as certain as man



["THERE'S SOMEONE IN THE SOUTH THINKS YOU HAVE BEEN AWAY FROM HER LONG ENOUGH; IS THAT IT, MR. BERESFORD?"]

can be that he never hoped to marry her himself."

If only Sir John had not taken that Australian trip, or if only Lady Fortescue's wifely devotion had not constrained her to accompany him!

Looking the position full in the face Paul felt it was a terribly perplexing one. However sure he felt himself of Mr. White's duplicity he had not the slightest proof of it.

To unprejudiced eyes the millionaire and his sister were Ivy's kindest friends and protectors. Though William Campbell said he knew things to Mr. White's discredit, what was—in public opinion—the testimony of a mere clerk against the owner of a million of money!

Looking anxiously over all he had ever heard of Ivy's history Paul's fears increased; save her uncle and aunt she had no relations in the world. And he had never heard of any very intimate friends—mere friends, too, would have to be intimate indeed to venture to interfere with the guardians Sir John had chosen for his niece.

Paul Beresford sat long into the night thinking, but before he went to bed his mind was made up on two points. He would tell Ivy all his distrust of Mr. White, and if she would only let him make her his wife he would marry her privately three days after his return to London.

What if people did call him a fortune-hunter, or assert he had been in a strange hurry to wed his wealthy bride? Could he not bear a few harsh criticisms rather than let his darling run the risk of a longer residence in the house of a man whom even honest, kindly-natured William Campbell denounced?

With the thought of a hurried marriage came, perhaps, naturally the memory of Mr. Ainslie.

Paul started. What had he been about to forget Ivy's godfather, the man who had known her all her life, and who enjoyed Sir John's utmost confidence?

Of course the Vicar of Starham was the very man to confide his woes to, and Paul sat down there and then to write to him.

His letter told Mr. Ainslie very few details. It merely reminded him how he had once trusted Mrs. Austin and her brother.

"I cannot explain matters in a letter," wrote Paul; "but I have grievous fears that your suspicions were too well founded. I hope to be in London in a day or two. If I telegraph to you from there will you join me for Ivy's sake?"

He slept better when that letter was sealed and stamped; but still his face had a haggard, anxious look when he found the Campbells at breakfast, and even the official summons to return to the head office in King William-street could not clear all the shadows from his brow.

"Good-bye!" said Bessie to him, when he was starting. "I know you are anxious, but I think all will be well. Willie has told me you may have to be married earlier than you intended. If Miss Carew's relations are still away, and she would be contented with a very quiet wedding, couldn't you bring her here, and let us play the parts of father and mother?"

It was a kindly offer, and Paul thanked her warmly. He meant to accept it if Ivy would agree; for by this time his fears had reached such a pitch that he was quite willing to leave the "Security" without even a week's notice, if it seemed desirable.

The first thing to be done, of course, was to see Ivy. He travelled by the night train; and so it was quite early in the day—barely ten o'clock—when, having surprised his landlady in Cecil-street, and enjoyed a breakfast and cold bath, he took a cab and drove to the millionaire's residence in Coningsby-street.

The servant who opened the door was a stranger to him, and looked rather suspiciously at the very easy visitor, who asked for Miss Carew.

"Miss Carew is not here, sir."

Paul started.

"But she was staying here with Mrs. Austin. I heard from her not three days ago!"

"Possibly, sir. I'm not one of the regular servants, but only a caretaker. The whole establishment were sent away on board wages yesterday."

"But the family?"

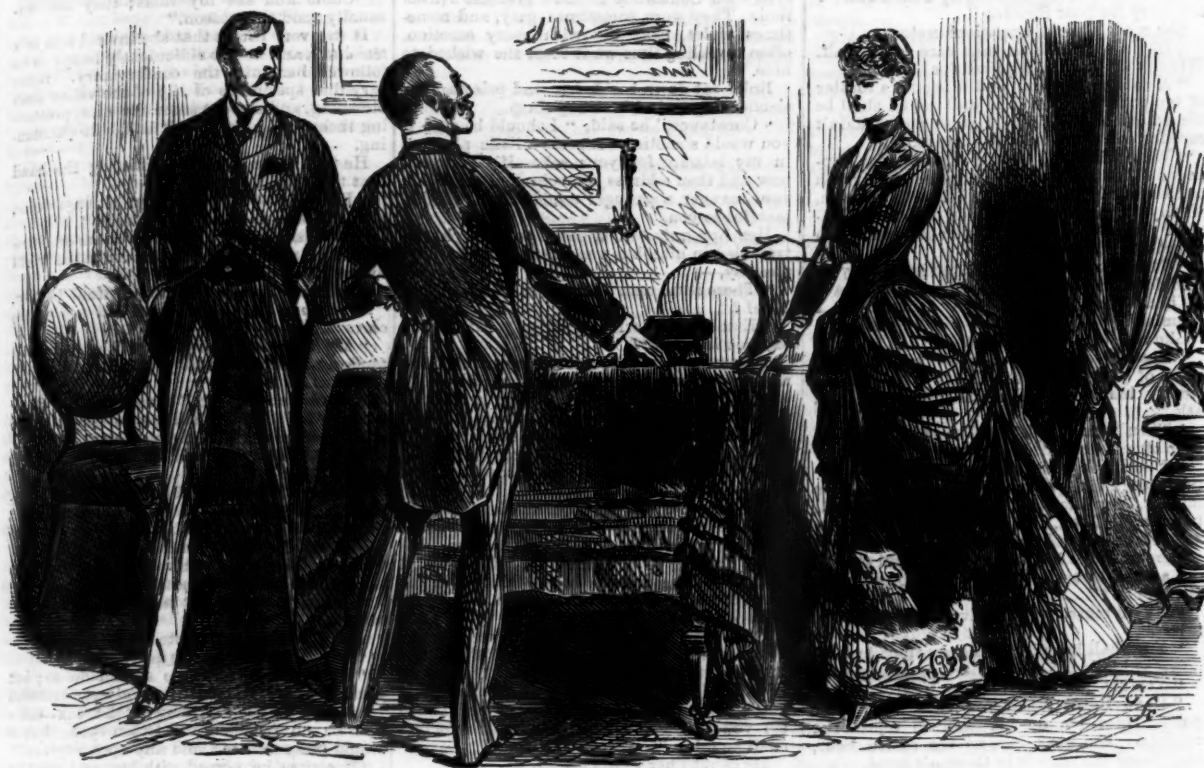
"Can't say, sir. They've gone South for the rest of the winter, I believe. I saw the cab drive off myself yesterday—two ladies and Mr. White."

"But where did they go?"

"Somewhere South. I didn't hear the name, sir," and then, having nothing more to communicate, the caretaker stolidly shut the door in Mr. Beresford's face.

(To be continued.)

AN ARITHMETICAL PUZZLE.—Here's a nut for our young friends to crack: "There were three boys engaged in selling apples. Two of them had thirty apples each, and the third had sixty apples, or exactly as many as the other two put together. The first boy sold his apples at two for one penny and therefore took in fifteen pence. The second sold his apples at three for one penny, and therefore took in ten pence. The two together took in twenty-five pence. But the third boy sold his sixty apples at five for two pence, and therefore only took in twenty-four pence. How can this be accounted for? To sell five apples for two pence ought to bring in as much as to sell two of them for one penny, and the other three for another penny; but it seems that it does not, if different people own the two apples and the three." We are still pondering this perplexing situation, and hope to discover some important application of it in our private finances.



["I TAKE CHARGE OF THE MONEY, MR. SAUL," CONSTANCE SAID.]

NOVELLETTE.]

A NIGHT OF WEEPING.

CHAPTER I.

"And so, my dear," said little Mrs. Euston, "the stupid girl is bent upon working her own ruin? How can she be so blind to her own interests and your happiness?" Mrs. Erard sighed. "I hoped to find comfort in Constance, but she is a source of much anxiety to me; and after the trouble I have had with her brother it seems not a little hard."

"And Gaston shows no sign of settling down?" queried her sympathetic friend.

"None; and of course he is well known as a 'detrital'; so that his chances of bettering himself by marriage are very few. His uncle got him a Government clerkship last year, but Gaston said it wasn't fit employment for a gentleman, and utterly refused to accept it. Of course my brother was offended, and will do nothing more for us. I often urge upon Constance that Gaston's extravagance will bring us to ruin, and that her only safety lies in fulfilling her promise to Rolfe Sterling."

"Just so," said Mrs. Euston, "and indeed what more can she desire in her husband? He is good-looking, generous, well-born, and rich; she should esteem herself a lucky girl."

"But she does not; and she tries Rolfe in every imaginable way: is gracious to other men whilst she snubs him; and although he is devoted to her, he is not the man to submit to any woman's caprices."

"He is not to be blamed for that; no true woman cares for a submissive lover."

"I know, I know; and I am daily expecting a rupture in their engagement."

The door of the pretty morning-room opened, and a young girl entered. She appeared about nineteen, was tall and splendidly propor-

tioned; she carried her head proudly, and the dominant expression of her lovely face was pride; the beautiful changeable eyes were more often haughty than tender, and when she spoke the sweet-cold tones had a dash of scorn in them.

She advanced with slow grace, and extended her hand to Mrs. Euston, who regarded her with some curiosity.

"It was said last night that you were the belle of the ball, Constance?" she remarked.

The proud sweet mouth curved in the faintest possible smile, about which there was a slight suspicion of contempt.

"You are inclined to flatter me, Mrs. Euston."

"No, indeed. I am but repeating the opinion of others; and I think Mr. Sterling would willingly endorse it. You are a very fortunate girl, Constance."

The haughty, lovely face was averted; the slim, white hands toyed impatiently with the flowers at her breast; then Constance Erard said coldly,—

"According to our little world's idea, I should be most happy; but why do you all combine to sing the same song? If Rolfe Sterling gives me his wealth and his name, do I not give him my youth and my beauty (you say that I am beautiful)? Is not that a fair bargain?"

Mrs. Euston looked at her in shocked surprise. Of course she knew that matrimonial bargains were constantly being cemented in the fashionable world, but it was not customary for girls to speak in such a vein as Constance Erard adopted. The little lady shook her head disapprovingly.

"Why do you so strongly object to this alliance, my dear?"

"Who says that I object?" a faint flush staining her beautiful cheek and throat; "and, pardon me, Mrs. Euston, I dislike having my affairs canvassed outside the family circle."

"Constance! Constance!" remonstrated her mother, seeing the visitor's angry flush, "why are you so unlike other girls? Why are you so ungracious to those who have your interests at heart?"

The girl stirred uneasily, then suddenly turned to Mrs. Euston. "I am sorry if I have made you angry," she said slowly; "but this morning I am not quite myself. I danced a great deal last night; and it was very late when I got to bed, in consequence of which I am a trifle petulant."

She smiled as she spoke; so faintly, yet so sweetly, that her offence was at once forgiven.

"You are very charming when you choose, Constance," said Mrs. Euston; "but why are you so rarely gracious? You would frighten most suitors away."

"In a number of cases the loss would be desirable," laughing softly.

Again the door opened, and this time to admit a handsome blond young man, who looked thirty, but was really five years younger. He bowed to the visitor, but crossed at once to the girl, who sat silent by the open window.

"Constance, I want you," he said, in a harsh, unpleasant voice. A momentary spasm of fear crossed and marred the lovely face; but she rose, and, with a light excuse to Mrs. Euston, left the room with her brother.

Together they went into the tiny conservatory, and, sinking on a seat, Constance lifted her eyes to the false, cruel face above her.

"Well, Gaston, what is it now?"

"The old cry," he answered, savagely. "I want money; was there ever a time when I did not? Was there ever a fellow who had such a beggarly allowance as I?"

"Many," the girl answered coldly. "And you have had every opportunity of increasing it. But you are too indolent to work, although you are not ashamed to beg."

The dusky flush of anger leapt up to his very brow.

"You have a bitter tongue, Constance. I am sorry for poor Sterling."

She made a swift, impatient gesture.

"He is well able to take care of himself. What is this money required for?"

"A debt of honour; and it is only a matter of ten pounds. But if it isn't paid I shall be kicked out of the club. I guess you wouldn't care for our name to be so degraded?"

"Would it be my fault if such a thing happened? Have I ever done anything to tarnish our honour?" she asked, with swift passion, wholly at variance with her ordinary manners. "And pray how do you suppose I can get ten pounds?"

"There is the ruby set Sterling gave you. I could pawn it for you; and you shall have it back again in less than a fortnight I promise."

She rose to her full height.

"Thank you! But I know too well the value of your promises; and I am not sufficiently hardened yet to do the thing you ask."

"Then you will let me be ruined for the sake of a little sentiment?"

"I am not given to sentiment," she said. "But, as I told you before, I am not dead to honour, nor incapable of gratitude. I will help you if I can, Gaston, for the sake of our father's name, and our mother's peace. But understand this is the last time I will stretch out a hand to assist you. When do you want the money?"

"By to-morrow at twelve. Not an hour later."

"You shall have it." And she stood looking down at him with cold, contemptuous eyes.

"You are quite sure?"

"Have I ever failed you yet?" And she passed him by, on her way to rejoin her mother. The next day, at the stated hour, she placed ten pounds in Gaston's hand.

He received them without thanking her. Neither did he ask how she obtained them. Perhaps he guessed that her jewel casket was the lighter. Perhaps he wondered if she had disposed of the ruby set. But he asked no questions, lest he should receive unpleasant answers.

"Understand," she said, "this is the last time I can pay your debts for you. To do so I must keep my tradesmen waiting, and it shall never be said I defrauded them of their rights."

Gaston did not stay to hear more. He was rather afraid of Constance in her present mood; for she, of all who knew him, was the only creature who dared comment on his actions.

The girl went back to the morning-room, looking weary and pale. There was no one to see her, and so she suddenly broke down, and covering her eyes, groaned aloud in the bitterness of her heart. But her emotion was soon spent, and when Rolf Sterling entered he found her calm and cold, as she always was with him.

He was a fine specimen of the English gentleman—tall, broad-shouldered, muscular, with a resolute, good-looking face, clear, determined eyes, and an easy bearing.

"Constance," he said, going to her side, and bending over her with something of anxiety in his dark eyes, "Constance, I have been planning a nice little excursion. The Eastons are going, and a few of our most familiar friends, so that, if the day is fine, it should be enjoyable."

"And where do you propose taking us, and how?" she asked languidly.

"To Pangebourne, and by yacht. The Glytie is finished, and I am anxious for you to see her."

He stooped as he spoke, and kissed the masses of yellow-brown hair, turned back in waves from the low, broad, white brow.

The girl did not respond to his caress; but a slight colour crept into her cheeks, and a strange look—half dread, half despair—darkened her changeable eyes.

Some men were wont to say that those same

eyes were Constance Erard's greatest attraction. They were sometimes grey, and sometimes violet, changing with every emotion, often revealing thus what most she wished to hide.

Rolf sat down beside her, and prisoned the slender fingers in his strong clasp.

"Constance," he said, "I should be glad if you would sometimes express a little pleasure in my labours for your sake—if you would now and then address me voluntarily. From your manner, a stranger would infer I am distasteful to you."

Her lips quivered slightly, and her hands trembled in his; but a moment later she said, steadily,—

"There is no man I esteem so highly as you, Rolf."

"Esteem?" he cried, quickly. "Canst you say you love me?"

"I am not given to protesting much," she answered, gravely. "I am not emotional."

"No," he said, lightly, dropping her hands. "You are not; because as I do so, and all my passionate devotion comes with you, must win a warm, pure word from you that is many ways indicative of love. Sometimes you misunderstand me, Constance."

She sat with lowered face, and he could not read the lines of pain about the mouth, sweet mouth, the anguish in the dark eyes. He knew nothing of her inner life, of the awful conflict raging in her heart, and so in his thoughtfulness of her was a trifle unjust.

Suddenly she turned to him.

"Are you not satisfied with me, Rolf?"

"Was I not just as quiet and cold when you asked me to buy your wife? Remember for my hand, and I gave it you; but if you begin to think you have made a very bargain I will set you free, and all the blame that follows shall be mine."

He caught her to his breast.

"Constance! Constance! you are wronging me cruelly! Of what use would freedom be to me when all my heart is in your keeping, when you fill all the hours and days of my life? But, sweetheart, do you wonder that sometimes I weary for a sign of love? Dear, I will try to be content with so little now. Perhaps, when we are married you will not be so cold; you will let me share your thoughts, anticipate your wishes, and, perhaps, too, you will be less chary of your caresses."

A deep crimson flush rose swiftly from throat to cheek, tinged even the white brow with tender pink. Involuntarily she stretched out her hands to him, but as quickly drew them back, and by a great effort recovered her usual almost icy composure.

"When I am your wife," she said, "I will try to please you in all things—that will be my duty."

How he wished she had said pleasure!

But to Constance's relief her mother entered at this moment, and greeted Rolf effusively. He bore with her patiently, although he had serious doubts of her sincerity, and listened whilst she went into well-bred caresses over the yachting excursion.

Of course, both she and Constance were delighted at the notion of sailing down the river with him, and Pangebourne was a pretty place, just the right spot for a picnic. And did he know how proud and glad she was to trust her dear child's future to so good and generous a man as he?

She was always telling Constance what a fortunate girl she was, and how grateful she should be to him.

The young man glanced deprecatingly at his silent fiancée; then said, somewhat abruptly,—

"There is no question of gratitude between Constance and me, Mrs. Erard; it is an absurd idea altogether. I owe Constance far more than I can ever repay."

A moment the tender light, so rarely seen, shone in the girl's beautiful eyes; but before he could fully assure himself he had seen it there it was gone.

She rose, and crossing to him, said,—

"Come and see my lilies; they are unusually good this season."

It was very rarely that she invited him to a tête-à-tête, and he felt ridiculously happy as he followed her into the conservatory. Some very fine specimens of lily-of-the-valley were blooming, and she cut some for him, presenting them with a smile half sad, half-questioning.

He took them from her, kissing the hand that tendered them.

"Rolf," she said, in a low, strange voice, "why is it you so dearly love me?"

"Because you are unlike any other creature because you are the one woman in the world whom I love so dearly."

"Is it really because I am beautiful?" she said.

"No, your love will shine as old age comes on me."

"My love will not change," gravely and tenderly. "Does not trust yourself and me with such foolish terms."

"Does not trust me?" she asked. "How can you tell that I shall not marry you for other reasons, not what you are?"

She started and winced, as though she had struck him.

"Don't! I hate to hear you talk so, Constance; and much as I love you I would not make you my wife if I believed you had accepted me from purely mercenary motives."

She sighed; then with very uncharacteristic abruptness turned to another subject.

"In Gaston's making one of the party to-morrow?"

"A slight frown contracted Rolf's brow. "If you like, and if he comes to."

"I am not anxious he should do so; but Mrs. Granby will talk if he is always excluded from our parties. I know, Rolf, that there can be no friendship between you; but it would be as well to avoid any open rupture."

Of course he agreed with her, and went on to tell her of his plans for her amusement, and the splendid arrangements of his new yacht.

The next day came; fair and bright, with a soft, warm west wind blowing. The sky was deep blue; the birds were singing their gayest; myriads of flowers were in bloom, and the chestnuts were putting on their loveliest garb.

A slight stir ran through the company when Constance and her mother arrived; the girl was looking unusually lovely. She wore a dress of some soft, thick, white material, devoid of any colour save a knot of pale pink roses at her breast. No bracelets disguised the contour of her beautiful arms; no monstrities marred the symmetry of her queenly figure.

"What a lucky beggar Sterling is!" said one man to another. "And how on earth did such a beast as Gaston Erard contrive to have such a sister!" Then he paused, and strained his ears to catch what Constance was saying.

"No, Mrs. Erard. Gaston decided, at the very last moment, not to accompany us, although Mr. Sterling very much pressed him to do so."

"Glad he didn't accept," muttered the listener to his friend. "I'm not a Simon Pure myself (what are you grinning at?), but I do draw a line at some things; and I shouldn't care to be known as Erard's friend."

"Some of his transactions are rather shady, aren't they? I hear, too, that his dealings with the Jews are not few or far between."

Then they were joined by some ladies, and for the remainder of the day forgot all about Gaston Erard and his misdeeds.

Rolf was supremely happy; never had Constance been so gracious in words and ways, never had she seemed so lovely. There was a tender light in the beautiful eyes, a softer tone in the young, sweet voice. The brightness of the day, the gay company, and perhaps the attentions lavished upon her, all had their effect upon her. She resolutely put aside all painful thoughts, all the cares and fears that so long had harassed her. To-day she would be glad; to-day nothing should trouble her peace; she would float with the stream, enjoy the present hour, come what might.

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How little she guessed that this was the last of all her happy times for very long—how little she thought that on the morrow her proud head would be bowed in shame, her heart would be well-nigh broken with its weight of woe! Life had often been hard with her, but it was to be harder still; and she would need all her courage, all her resolution, to bear her on.

There was not a single hitch in the arrangements. The luncheon had been spread in the open, and men and girls disported themselves upon the grass fearlessly, for the season was an unusually dry one. After luncheon the younger members of the party stole off in couples, ostensibly to study the scenery, and in a very little while Constance found herself alone with her lover.

"This is glorious!" he said, leaning towards her. "I don't know when I have been so happy; or when you have been so beautiful and so gracious."

She smiled down at him as he lay at her feet. "It is good to be loved as you love me," she said simply. "I wish that I were worthier of you!" It seemed to him she was on the point of adding something that might mar his felicity, so he broke in quickly.

"Don't speak of anything unpleasant to-day."

He threw an arm about her, and drew her close. "Constance, my darling (my wife!)" he cried; and this time she did not shrink from him; rather she allowed her beautiful face to rest upon his shoulder, and looked into his eyes with such passion that he almost believed he was as dear to her as she to him.

"Your tenderness!" he whispered, "is more precious than another woman's, because it is so rare!" and he laid his cheek to hers, thanking Heaven for this godly gift.

As evening came on the company re-assembled, and under cover of the friendly twilight, Rolfe possessed himself of the girl's hand, nor did she withdraw it. Just for this one sweet hour she was content to be all in all to him; to let the future remain undecided.

Songs were sung and stories told—laughter and merriment held sway amongst the young people, and when the farewells were being spoken, all agreed that never had they spent so pleasant a day; and one or two girls went home with hearts sore with envy of Constance Erard's exceptionally brilliant lot. Of course Rolfe escorted mother and daughter home; and Mrs. Erard, always anxious to grant the young man chances of pressing his devotion upon her child, left them alone for a little while.

"Has the day been good?" asked Rolfe, with his arm about Constance's waist.

"I have been very happy. How could I be otherwise when all were so kind?"

The faint, sweet perfume of the dying roses at her breast came wafted up to him. Gently he possessed himself of the flowers, and for many days they would remain with him, mementos of dead happiness and hopes, sign and seal of woman's treachery (at least, so he would tell himself). But to-night—oh! to-night—he was half-drunk with happiness. He had scarcely anything left to desire. There was no thorn in his rose, no less in the cup offered him to drink.

He walked home in a sort of jubilant trance. To-day he had seen something of his lady-love's heart. He had surprised her into a confession of attachment to himself. She had been so sweet, so gentle, that he speculated on long years spent together in the happiest fashion. She had kissed him voluntarily at parting, and her last words lingered with him yet.

Meanwhile Constance sat alone in the drawing-room waiting for her brother's return; that was almost always her duty. The servants had long gone to their respective rooms. Her mother was already asleep. She took up "The Valley of Poppies," and tried to read, but her thoughts wandered to Rolfe, and all the shadows that had lately chilled her beauty were lifted.

"I will put everything aside, and cling to him. I will tell him all, and as he is generous he will estimate my past harshness at its true worth. We will be very happy together."

Suddenly there was a knocking at the hall-door. Constance rose, all the tenderness gone from her eyes, her face grown hard and cold once more.

She went slowly downstairs, and, unfastening the bolts, admitted Gaston. He staggered by her, and stumbled upstairs. She slid the bolts back into their sockets and followed him back to the drawing-room, with such disgust in her eyes, such scorn in her manner, that even he, intoxicated as he was, was aware of it. He leered up at her, and said huskily,—

"I say, here, old girl; don't look so savage. I'm not drunk—only Tler gets a glass too much sometimes."

Still she stood, glancing down upon him, cold and silent, majestic as an outraged queen.

"I shay, give me some wine?" he said, lurching forward in his chair.

"You have had more than enough already; go to bed, Gaston."

But he vehemently resisted this suggestion, and with a superb gesture of disdain she turned to leave him. But he called her back, and giving a pocket-book into her hands bade her take care of it until the morning.

Scarcely glancing at it she took it from him, and carried it to her room; then, as the light fell full upon it, she thought she recognized the silver clasps, and stooped to decipher the letters engraved upon them. Then she started back, horror and despair in her eyes. She flung out her hands with a passionate gesture, infinitely more eloquent than words, and fell against the bed for support.

"Oh Heaven!" she cried; "what does this mean? How did that book come into Gaston's hands?" She fell on her knees and hid her tortured face in the coverlet. "My heart will break if what I fear is true. Oh, my heart will break!"

She knelt there for very long, until her brain grew giddy, and she was sick and faint; then she rose, but only to cast herself upon her bed and to lie there through all the long night, half mad with the fear she dared not put into words. It seemed to her that dawn would never break; but it came at last grey and chill, with no faint twittering from the birds under the eaves, no rosy clouds to lighten the neutral tints of the sky. A small fine rain was falling, and as Constance dragged herself to the window it beat in upon her; the wind chilled her, but she was heedless of all minor discomforts, conscious only of one thought.

But habit was strong with her, so she changed her dress, bathed her face, and smoothed the heavy masses of tumbled yellow-brown hair.

Then slowly and heavily she went down to her solitary breakfast, and waited with what patience she could command for Gaston to join her.

Her mother, fatigued with the exertions of the previous day, did not put in an appearance; to her surprise (and also her relief) Rolfe had not yet called, and so the slow morning wore on, and she sat waiting, waiting, longing, yet fearing to know the worst.

At last she heard Gaston's step, and she rose to meet him—whiter, if possible, than before—with such fear in her beautiful eyes, the man's heart might well have been touched. The anxious expression on his face was not calculated to allay her suspicions.

"Have you found anything belonging to me, Constance?" he said, watching her furtively, and speaking in a more conciliatory tone than he usually did.

"I have not; but I think I have the article in my possession that you fancy you have lost. You gave it into my charge last night. You were then too intoxicated to know what you did. Gaston! how did you get this?"

and she produced the pocket-book with silver clasps.

The red flush died from the young man's cheek and brow; and the hand he extended trembled violently. "It was given into my charge yesterday."

"That is a lie," she answered, as white and trembling as he. "Rolfe did not see you yesterday;" her voice was dreadfully strained and hoarse.

"Do you accuse me of theft?" Gaston cried, in a blustering way.

"I do. Heaven help me!" and she sank moaning into a chair. "Had we not suffered enough that you should bring such disgrace on our name, that you should drag us down to the dust?"

"Be quiet; someone will overhear you. Connie, upon my honour I never meant to do it; I was half mad. I had lost so much, and given T.O.U.'s to the amount of three hundred odd. I didn't know where to turn for help since you refused to assist me again, and I went off to Sterling's chambers, hoping to find him in. I knew he would lend me the money for your sake."

"And how did you propose paying him?"

"Oh! he would never have asked for payment. Well, as chance would have it, I saw his pocket-book lying upon the mantel-piece (why on earth did the fool put temptation in my way?). I opened it, and found it was full of notes and gold—and—and—"

"And you stole it," said his sister, with bitter pain and shame in her tones.

"You're a most unpleasant way of calling a spade a spade!" he said, savagely; and, after all, Sterling will not feel his loss. I only paid the most pressing of my debts—he will never miss a paltry hundred and fifty. Of course I was mad to do such a thing, but I'll find means to return the book to his rooms, and for your own sake you will keep silent about it."

"Do you suppose I should boast of such an achievement? But this stolen money must be refunded. How is it to be done? Mother must be taken into our counsel."

"Where is the use of troubling her—and I verily believe you long to expose me to her? To do so will be to break her heart, and worry her all to no purpose. She can't help me; the last little bit of property was mortgaged last week for my benefit."

He shrank before the look she cast upon him.

"Why have I been kept in ignorance of this thing? Has my little fortune gone to pay your debts too?"

"Yes," sullenly; "there was nothing else left us to do; and after all you won't want it. You must hurry up with your wedding, and then you and the old lady will be provided for, and occasionally you can lend me a helping hand."

"Thank you; you have mapped out the future very ingeniously; and my husband is to marry not only me, but all my family? Yours is a nice arrangement if only it can be carried out."

"Don't sneer in that fashion!" Gaston retorted savagely; "but tell a fellow what to do. You've plenty of brains, and know how to use them."

The contempt on her face made the coward long to strike her, but he had too much need of her assistance to provoke her further.

"First, this," touching the pocket-book, "must be returned; then we must find means to make good his loss. I have still some jewellery left, and that must go—there is my ruby set."

"But," interrupted Gaston, "Sterling must miss that, as you once said."

"That is my risk," she answered, with stony calm; "but I will not trust anything into your hands. I myself will transact this business."

"You're a brick, Constance; and I'll bring Timothy Saul round this afternoon. Make some excuse to join us in the library."

CHAPTER II.

WHEN her brother had left her, Constance sat with her face buried in her hands, but she did not moan or cry. She was a strong woman, and was generally beyond the relief of tears in any great calamity.

So now she sat silent and motionless as though carved in stone; and one seeing her could not guess her heart was well-nigh bursting with its weight of woe, its awful burden of shame.

And only yesterday she had allowed herself to be glad, had given Rolfe some tokens of love, had allowed him to read her nature aright, and she hated herself for her slight concession.

"It will be harder for him to bear," she thought, in a terrified way, "and I so wanted to spare him pain!"

Then she heard his voice in the hall, and nerved herself to meet him. It was an unusually pale face that was turned towards him, but it was perfectly calm, and the lovely eyes had resumed much of their old haughtiness.

Rolfe took her in his arms and kissed her, feeling a little chilled by her manner; then he said,—

"Something very unpleasant has happened yesterday, Constance!"

So it had come! She drew a deep breath and nerved herself to meet this ordeal, as she had met others before.

"Sit down and tell me all about it," and she sank into a chair she had placed skillfully in the shadows cast by curtains and flowers.

So he told her that on his return home the previous night he had searched vainly for his pocket-book. "Of course," he said, "I should not have left it lying about, but I was rather late in starting out, and entirely forgot it. It seems that some person or persons must have entered my room in the temporary absence of my valet, and carried off the prize."

"Was it very valuable?" asked Constance, lightly clasping her hands.

"Yes, it contained fifteen notes, some gold, and a quantity of business papers. Indeed, I may say it is a very heavy loss."

"Of course you have the numbers of the notes?"

"No, I haven't, and there lies the mischief. I couldn't swear to one of the fifteen."

A relieved look passed over her face, but he did not see that, for it was averted. He only thought her unusually quiet, and a little constrained.

"What measures do you intend taking in the matter, or have you already acted?" was her next question.

"Oh! I went straight to Scotland-yard, and by this time a detective is engaged in ferreting out the thief."

The slim, white fingers were convulsively clasped, the sweet, low tones sounded harsh and strained as she said,—

"Then you intend dealing out punishment to the offender?"

"Most decidedly!" in a surprised voice. "A small theft I could forgive, but one such as this deserves the fullest penalty the law can inflict. At Scotland-yard they tried to make me suspect poor Dawson, but I urged that he had served me faithfully and honestly for fourteen years and I could not bring myself to doubt him."

"You were quite right, Rolfe; I am quite sure Dawson is not the thief!"

"You speak positively," amazed at her eager defence of his valet. "How can you be sure of the man's honesty when you know so little of him?"

"I am guided by instinct, perhaps."

Rolfe rose.

"I shall have to run away, Constance, for I've a great deal to do, and this business worries me pretty considerably. But I'll come round in the evening and we'll go to the Lyceum. *Romeo and Juliet* to-night, you know. Oh! do you suppose Gaston could give me any assistance in this matter?"

"I am quite sure he could not," with languid coldness; "anything in the way of work is beyond him," and she lifted her face to be kissed. Then he was gone, and once more she was alone with her bitter thoughts.

At luncheon Mrs. Erard appeared, looking very faded and worn in the full light of the May day.

"Where is Gaston?" she asked, glancing round the room fretfully.

"I do not know; but whilst we are alone, mother, I want to speak with you."

"For pity's sake, don't say you intend breaking off your engagement! I thought yesterday you seemed quite contented with things as they are."

"It is of our own affairs, mother, that I have to speak. I heard something that surprised me greatly—Gaston was my informant."

The elder woman began to tremble, because she knew how deeply she had wronged her child, and was afraid of the reckoning that soon or late must follow.

"Is it true," asked the girl, "that all your little property is mortgaged?"

Mrs. Erard began to cry weakly. "Constance! Constance! I could not help it. Gaston is so extravagant, and his creditors began to threaten him."

"So you squandered your fortune and my poor little dowry for Gaston's sake? Mother, was it wise or right—was it even motherly to do so?"

"Don't blame me. How could I bear to see my boy disgraced? I was always so proud of him, and I hoped he would settle down," said the poor feeble creature. "I persuaded myself, too, that you would never miss the thousand pounds that were yours by right. I knew if you married Rolfe you would be perfectly safe. Constance! Constance! don't be angry with me. I am not so strong as I was."

The beautiful girl knelt down, and took the gray head upon her shoulder. "I am not angry, mother, only most grieved. Try to be calm, dear, and tell me all about it. Were the thousand pounds all gone before I became engaged to Mr. Sterling?"

"Yes. Oh! Constance, you won't let this make any difference to you? You won't let false notions of honour come between you and happiness? Remember, if you do, we are hopelessly beggared, and poor Gaston has not been trained for work of any kind."

Gaston! Gaston! that was always the cry! He was always her mother's first care; but this was no time for reproaches. She said gently, "Then we are living under false pretences. Mother, this must not go on any longer."

"Shall you tell Rolfe?" asked the mother tremulously. "Do you think it would be wise? Can't you keep him in ignorance until after your marriage?"

The beautiful eyes darkened with scorn, the proud, sweet mouth lost its tender curves, but her words were quiet still.

"When do you suppose the climax will come?"

"Unless Rolfe helps us I shall be declared bankrupt by the close of the season."

"And is there nothing left?" a note of despair in her young voice.

"Nothing. Gaston has had all, and at the best it was but a very little all."

"It was sufficient to keep us in comfort," wearily. "Well, mother, I must think what can be done, and to do that I must be alone."

"You will not break with Rolfe?" urged Mrs. Erard, entreatingly.

"My plans are not yet formed," and she went slowly from the room, her face set and stern, her heart bowed down with a grief almost too great to bear.

In the afternoon a message reached her from Gaston. "Come down and bring your ornaments with you. I am in the library."

She read the pencilled words, then turning to the servant said, "Is Mr. Gaston alone?"

"No, miss; there is a—a gentleman with him; he has been here before."

"Thank you." She paused a moment before her glass, and smiled scornfully at her own reflection; the pallid cheeks and heavy eyes seemed to excite her disdain. Then she went downstairs, bending her steps towards the library. She found Gaston there, and with him a short, red-haired ferret-eyed man of about thirty who at her entrance sprang up, and extended a huge hand plentifully adorned with rings.

She ignored the hand, and, bowing coldly, remained standing.

"My dear Miss Erard," said he of the rings. "I—I am delighted to see you, although I could have wished I had come on a pleasanter errand."

Still ignoring him she produced from her pocket a quantity of jewellery, which she spread upon the table, in a little glittering row.

"Do the best you can for yourself, Gaston. I will have nothing to do with this transaction," and she shuddered as she looked at Rolfe's gifts.

Timothy Saul broke in. "I'm disposed to treat your brother handsomely, for your sake, miss. You're a lady I greatly respect," and he glanced admiringly at the tall, *svelte* figure, the haughty, half-averted face. "If any one in the trade is disposed to be fair, why it's Timothy Saul. How else would he have made his money? Why, bless you, miss, I've got the largest connection in the city. You see the old man laid the foundation, and I raised the structure. Ah! ah! not bad that?"

"Conclude your business, if you please," Constance said, her voice a tone colder if possible than before. "This interview is not pleasant for me."

"Of course not; I quite understand that," broke in Timothy the irrepressible. This naughty scamp of a brother (with elephantine playfulness), "costs you no end of trouble. But, bless you, a fellow must sow his wild oats."

She turned to the window, and stood silently there, whilst Timothy drove his bargains with Gaston; but at the clinking of the coins she swiftly veered round.

"I take charge of the money, Mr. Saul."

"Quite right, quite right. Ah! my boy"—slapping Gaston upon the shoulder—"your sister is too wide-awake to trust you with the cash. Now, if you please, Miss Erard, I've something to say to you. If ever I can help you at any time you have but to say so, and my services are yours."

"At what rate of remuneration?" she demanded scornfully, and left the room.

The money-lender looked after her with a flushed, angry face.

"Now, look here, Erard, I want to know what your sister means by treating me in such an off-hand way? Why, bless my soul, I could buy you up fifty times over, and hardly miss the money."

"I know," Gaston said, moodily. "But Constance is as proud as Lucifer; and her temper has been upset to-day."

"Well, I don't object to spirit in a woman, as long as it isn't carried too far. Now, Erard, I'm going to befriend you. But as I never do anything without an eye to my own interest, I shall expect something in return."

"Go on. I'm in your hands, and can't help myself, though I never thought to consort with a pawnbroker."

"Softly, softly, young man. I'm not very patient. Well, I've money; but I want something more. I want to visit at such places as you do. Lord! worse men than Timothy Saul got into society just through their cash. Set me afloat, and give me chances of meeting your sister, and, by Jingo, I'll out that fellow Sterling out."

"What the deuce do you mean?" roared Gaston.

"Just what I say," coolly. "I'm awfully gone on Constance, and I mean to marry her if I can."

The brother longed to strike him for his presumption, but was restrained from doing

so by selfish motives. Saul could pay him handsomely for his services; and he wanted money so badly, since Constance insisted upon sending the proceeds of her little sale to Rolef, and certainly she would be unable to help him further.

"Tell me how to set about my work?" he said sullenly, "and give me a few pounds to help me on."

"Well, as you're a gentleman, I must pay you accordingly;" and he counted out fifteen sovereigns into Gaston's greedy palm.

"Now come with me for a stroll, and we'll talk matters over. You're never safe from listeners in a house."

Constance, meanwhile, had gone to her room, and was slowly placing the gold pieces in the pocket-book (there was still a very large deficit), and writing a few words on a slip of paper, she enclosed it with the money.

"Your loss shall be made good, if the writer dies in the attempt to refund it. For the sake of all you hold dear, don't try to discover the unhappy thief."

She had scarcely finished when a note from Rolef was brought her. In it he begged her to excuse his attendance that night, as a very old friend had suddenly appeared at his chambers, and insisted upon carrying him off to a club dinner. "I can hardly refuse," he added, "as Molyneux starts for India to-morrow."

A flush of hope flooded the fair face. Her way was clear to her now. She had been harassed in her mind as to the means of returning the pocket-book to Rolef. She was so no longer. Waiting until it was growing dusk, she dressed herself, and covering her face and hair with a thick, black fall, stole downstairs, and out of the house. It was not hard to obtain a cab, and soon she was driving towards Rolef's chambers.

Arrived there, the cabman jumped down, and coming to the door received a small, but heavy parcel from her.

"Take this, and give it into Mr. Sterling's valet's hands; and tell him to deliver it to his master at the earliest opportunity. You need wait for no answer, as I am in a great hurry to return."

The man did as she bade him, and in an incredibly short time he was back in the old familiar street, and not fifty yards from her home.

The servant who opened the door to her regarded her with some astonishment, and shook his head knowingly as she disappeared up the stairs. But Constance cared nothing for any comments or strictures upon her conduct. She was conscious of her own rectitude, and to a nature like hers that was all-sufficient. Throwing off her bonnet and mantle she went down, and just outside the dining-room was met and accosted by Gaston.

"Constance," he said, nervously, "I'm afraid you'll be vexed at my news, but upon my life I could not help myself. The fellow had done me a good turn, and—"

"Come to the point."

"Well, I asked him to dinner, and I hope you'll treat him civilly, Constance, for it isn't wise to make an enemy of Timothy Saul."

She crimsoned painfully.

"I am sorry you have so little consideration for me; most brothers are careful not to bring disreputable men in contact with their sisters."

"But Saul is highly respectable, and immensely rich; besides which he is disposed to be friendly towards us. Don't let class prejudice carry you too far!"

Without a word she passed him by, and slipped quietly into her seat. Timothy Saul was seated in the place of honour, and the poor hostess looked sadly bewildered and dismayed.

Constance cast one swift glance round. This was no time for speech, as the servants were present, so she inclined her head frigidly to the guest, who was regarding her with boldest admiration.

She never spoke throughout the meal unless

when addressed, and then answered in the merest monosyllables: she felt she could not breathe in the same room with this man, of whom she had an instinctive distrust, and was heartily glad when she and her mother escaped to the drawing-room.

But they were not long left in peace. Timothy was a temperate man and refused to sit long over his wine, so that Gaston was compelled in courtesy to accompany him to the drawing-room. The pawnbroker, who was not afflicted with bashfulness, at once attached himself to Constance.

"I reckon, Miss Erard, you aren't too pleased to see me here as a guest?"

"I am very surprised. Hitherto my acquaintance has been limited to gentlemen."

Timothy bit his lip, and endeavoured not to look angry; then he said,—

"It is quite natural you should be annoyed at my presence, because I am of Jewish extraction, and I know there is a prejudice against Jews; but my mother was a Christian, and I share all her tastes and opinions. Well, you may say there is another reason why you dislike me—my profession is repulsive to you, but I can assure you it is a paying one."

"I am quite cognizant of that," coldly, but he went on, unheeding her interruption,

"When I marry I shall be able to keep my wife in fine old style, and as I only mean to marry a lady I shall leave my business to the care of a competent manager."

"Is it wise, Mr. Saul, to confide so much to a stranger?"

"Oh, I can trust you; and although you may not believe it, you are greatly concerned in my affairs. I say, you're not going yet?" as she rose, and prepared to leave him.

Gaston came to the rescue. He saw by his sister's face that she was being tried beyond endurance, and it would not do to allow her to insult his golden goose.

"Sing to us, Constance, that pretty little thing of Millard's, 'Waiting.'"

"You should know, Gaston, I only sing to friends!" and she swept out of the room, leaving a very uncomfortable sensation behind.

The next day Rolef came early, being very eager to impart his news to Constance.

"Just fancy, sweetheart," he said, "the thief had conscientious qualms and restored my property—at least nearly all of it, with a promise to make up the deficit. The whole affair is very mysterious. A cabman left a small parcel with Dawson, with the injunction to give it me at the earliest opportunity; when I unfastened the string I found it was my pocket-book. See, I have brought the note to show you. Of course it is a disguised hand."

"Not necessarily," and her voice was so cold, her manner so strange, that he looked at her in surprise.

"I have wearied you with my gossip about this unpleasant affair?" he said, questioningly.

"Oh no; it is pleasant to be the amused and not the amuser."

"Are you not well? You are so white and languid, and your hands are as cold as death," he said, regarding her very anxiously.

"I am very well, but a little tired," and she moved into the shadows.

His quick eye fell upon her beautiful slender hands, and a sudden sense of anger seized him, for the third finger of her left hand was bare.

"Where is your ring, Constance?" he asked, sharply. "Are you ashamed of your engagement?"

She grew paler under his angry regard.

"I—I forgot to wear it," she said lamely, and she saw he was not satisfied.

"Sometimes," he said, more sorrowfully than reproachfully, "I am afraid that you care nothing for me. I have even thought that your words of two days since meant nothing; your looks and your gestures were all assumed. Constance, why are you so cold to me?"

"Am I cold? Perhaps it is my nature," wearily; "but you agreed to accept me as I

was. And if I am more than usually quiet you must attribute it to my anxiety concerning Gaston."

She almost broke down there, and in an instant Rolef was beside her, his arms about her, and accusing himself (unjustly enough) of harshness towards her.

"All your anxieties shall be ended now, dear heart. When you are my wife your brother will have no power to trouble you. I suppose Mrs. Erard will continue to keep house with him?"

"I hardly know yet; everything is unsettled."

"It need not be. I am waiting anxiously for you to fix the date of our wedding. When shall it be, sweetheart? There is no valid reason for delay."

"You shall have my answer to-morrow; do not hurry me too much."

"It shall be as you wish; but I should like it to take place not later than the first week of July. If you love me, Constance, why do you hesitate to give yourself to me?"

"You don't understand. There are so many things to be settled first."

Rolef looked impatient.

"Why can't we go to church as we are? Where is the use of ceremony, or a congregation of friends? And will you be happier married in a satin gown than if you wore a print?"

She smiled faintly.

"You remind me of the old country ditty,

"What shall I be married in,
Johnny, my dear, pretty lad?
'Brown stuff frock and print apron,
If you think it good.'"

"Johnny was a sensible lad," laughed Rolef, "and, doubtless, his sweetheart would appear to greater advantage in ordinary dress; but seriously, Constance, when are you going to make me happy?"

To his surprise she suddenly hid her face in her hands.

"I am afraid I shall never give you joy," she said, in a strange, muffled voice.

"I wish you would not so under-rate your own merits, my darling. Poor girl, you are anxious and weary! Well, I will worry you no more; but, sweetheart, I have one thing to say—when we are married I shall forbid Gaston our house."

"I expected no other. Under no circumstances could you receive him."

He went home that morning not a little disturbed in his mind; doubtful of Constance's love, yet afraid to believe she was indifferent to him, because she seemed the very breath of his life, and he hoped that when once they were man and wife he should overcome her coldness, win her to some interest in his pursuits.

At night he saw her again, and insisted on carrying her and Mrs. Erard off to the Opera. He thought Constance was looking ill and *distrait*, that she paid but very small attention to the performance; but he had no presentiment of evil as he walked homewards.

He slept well that night, and rose early; but already his breakfast was prepared, and Dawson had placed his letters by his plate. The first was directed in Constance's well-known hand, and anticipating some pleasant surprise he tore it open.

Thus it ran:—

"I tried to tell you what was in my mind to-day; but my courage failed me, and so before I go to my room I am determined to tell you something of the truth. I don't expect you can ever forgive me, so I only hope you will forget me."

"I cannot keep my promise to you. I could not make you happy. My heart and conscience alike cry out against our union—I have nothing to give you. Perhaps when you know how hardly I have served you, you will first hate and then put me out of your heart and thoughts. I hope you will."

"I break our engagement of my own free will, and without my mother's knowledge, and

I pray you to believe I am acting for the best. Do not try to see me—you could not turn me from my resolution."

That was all. No excuse offered for her conduct, no great sorrow expressed. The letter fell from his nerveless hand, and he sat staring helplessly before him, incapable of realising his misery in this first moment.

She had ruthlessly blighted his life—she, whom he had loved so idolatrously. She had laid all his future waste, and filled him with a great wrath against fate, a great hatred of his species.

Suddenly he laughed bitterly.

"She was loth to accept my gifts," he thought. "She is equally loth to part with them. It is well she should hold fast the price of her truth."

He loved her passionately, and as he would love no other woman in all the world; but he was a proud man, far too proud to plead for mercy from a heartless coquette. If she had never held him dear it were better; to let her go her way unmolested; scarcely ever, throughout their intercourse, had she treated him with more cordiality than she did the hundred and one men she was in the habit of meeting.

"She has no heart," he said, savagely, and tried to believe his words, but he could not quite forget certain looks and words; that spoke of a passionate nature, of a fire under the ice.

For hours his strong resentment strengthened his determination not to see her again; but towards evening his whole heart rose in protest against his reason, and cried out for Constance. "Perhaps," he thought, "some over-conscientious scruples have led her to this decision. I must know and combat with them."

He had wandered towards Westminster Bridge, and feeling exhausted and hungry, entered the Café Lombardo. A courteous waiter at once led him to a little marble-topped table, at the far end of the dining saloon, and brought him the bill of fare. As he sat, waiting for his dinner to be served, another man entered, and seated himself at the next table. Looking idly up, Rolfe recognised Timothy Saul.

"Good evening," said the irrepressible broker. "Have you seen anything of Erard to-day? I've fooled away six or seven hours looking after him. He promised to meet me in Parliament-street at twelve; and though I've hung about the place ever since he hasn't turned up."

"I have not seen him," Rolfe answered, coldly; "we rarely meet."

"Ah! you don't cotton to him, as brother Jonathan says. Just so; he is a trifle too wild for your taste, I reckon; but then plenty of fellows will forgive him a lot for his sister's sake. By Jove, Miss Erard is the most splendid woman I've ever been my luck to meet; she beats Lil Oxford (a popular dawsense) altogether!"

Rolfe's face was a study as he answered,—

"Miss Erard should be flattered by your preference; but, pardon me, Saul, gentlemen do not discuss ladies at café."

The unabashed Timothy here turned to the waiter, and receiving his chicken and ham, demanded a pint of port.

"This is not a licensed house, sir; but we can send out for anything you may choose." Timothy threw down the money.

"Let's have a bottle, then. I say, Sterling, you'll share it; I'll stand treat for once," and he carried his plate to Rolfe's table. "Why shouldn't we dine together? It will be a deal more sociable."

Rolfe detested the fellow for his arrogance and vulgarity, but he allowed him to seat himself opposite him; and as his own dinner was then brought up, applied himself to it with the zest of a hungry man.

When he had somewhat satisfied his appetite, he found time to address his companion.

"I hope, for his mother's sake, you will deal

generously with Gaston. I am afraid he is a source of constant and great anxiety to her."

"I guess he is; but I'm not likely to be rough with him," answered Timothy, with an odious leer. "I shouldn't care to disgrace him for his sister's sake."

As he spoke Rolfe's eyes fell upon his right hand; on the little finger, a ring, set with diamonds and rubies, gleamed and burned; the device was a curious one, the stones unusually fine.

"Where did you get that?" he demanded, in a low, fierce voice.

"Ah, ha!" said Timothy, grinning facetiously; "you didn't think I was a man the ladies would favour? I haven't got birth, and I haven't got beauty, but I have got the pieces. They say you're rich, but, bless you, I could buy you up; and every year my income increases."

"Tell me how that ring came into your possession?" Rolfe said again.

"Well, perhaps I shouldn't tell you: I don't want to abuse a lady's confidence, but you're a safe fellow, and I'm glad to make my luck known. Miss Erard gave it me on the night I dined with them."

Rolfe's face was ghastly, but he said quietly enough,—

"You mean she pledged or sold it you, to pay one of her rascally brother's debts?"

"I mean nothing of the kind. She gave it to me as a sign of her affectionate regard. Ah! Sterling, I'm awfully sorry for you. I heard you were 'gone' in that quarter, but all's fair in love or war."

Without a word Rolfe rose, and, having paid his bill, went out into the street, unconscious of what he did, or where he wandered.

"Let her go," he thought bitterly; "she was never worthy an honest man's regard; but most women would have hesitated before parting with a betrothal ring in such a fashion."

CHAPTER III.

"HELLO, Sterling! have you heard the news?" cried a young fellow, one July morning, as he buttonholed Rolfe in the Strand.

"What news?" questioned the other in a dry, matter-of-fact tone.

"Why the Erards are to be sold up, and no one knows where they are gone. They have all disappeared effectually. It must be an awful blow to the girl."

"I don't know about that," Rolfe retorted, caustically. "Her brother has circulated a report that she is soon to marry Timothy Saul, and he is almost a millionaire."

"You were once bridegroom-elect, weren't you? Beg pardon, old fellow, I had no right to ask such a question. But as for the report, I don't believe it. Miss Erard would never throw herself away on that vulgar little wretch, and her brother's word can't be relied on."

"Just so. I understand he has been kicked out of his club."

"That's right, too—caught cheating at cards; he's a bad lot. Well, ta-ta, old fellow, take care of yourself. You're not looking very robust."

Whilst this conversation was going on, the Erards were together in a little room in a by-street leading from Euston Station. Mother and son were seated, the former crying feebly, the latter scowling up at the tall, beautiful woman who stood before him, contempt in her eyes, pain and shame upon her face.

"Mother, you must listen to me now. I shall speak very plainly and very briefly. I should be sorry to add to your trouble, but I hope you will see the force of my arguments. Dear so long as I have health and strength, I will work for you gladly; but I utterly refuse to support Gaston in idleness. If he chooses to find employment, I will do my best to forget the past, and make home pleasant for him. But if he will not work he shall not share either our bread or our lodging."

The young man darted to his feet with an oath. The mother stretched out her hands imploringly to the pale, stern girl.

"Constance! Constance! how hard your heart is! How can Gaston work? What can he do? Do you forget he is a gentleman?"

"Mother," sorrowfully, "I am afraid his pretensions to that name are small; and have I ever been taught to labour for my bread? Is it not as hard for me as for him? If he can do nothing else let him enlist."

"What! My son a private soldier! You are mad, Constance! How could he endure the privations of such a life? You know," reproachfully, "he is not strong."

"Because he has wasted his strength in dissipation," the girl answered sternly.

"Mother, Gaston has good abilities, is an excellent draughtsman, a capital pianist; surely he might turn his talents to account? Our old friends would doubtless assist him for the sake of bygone days."

"Am I to be at the beck and call of every petty tradesman's child?" Gaston demanded, angrily. "Thank you, Constance; I have too much self-respect and pride for that."

"It must be a poor pride that allows you to live upon your mother and sister," she retorted, bitterly. "But I have no more to say. If you will work, well and good; if not, you leave here on Saturday. I cannot keep you in idleness."

She went out of the room, and mother and son could hear her moving to and fro in the adjoining apartment.

"She is going out," whispered Mrs. Erard. "Stay with me, Gaston; I shall have something to say to you."

Presently Constance appeared dressed for walking, with her portfolio under her arm.

"I shall be probably be absent two or three hours, mother," she said, and, stooping, kissed the fretful, worn face with pitying tenderness.

"I don't like you to go out by yourself," said Mrs. Erard, feebly.

"There is no help for it now, dear; to live one must have work."

Then the door closed behind her, and, sighing, the mother remarked that Constance had all her father's rude strength of character; then dismissing the subject, motioned Gaston to draw his chair close to hers.

"I have a little money, dear," she said, "of which Constance knows nothing. I saved it for you," and she placed a few pieces of gold in his hand. "Make it last as long as you can, for I'm afraid I shall never have any more for you."

"We might roll in riches if only Constance would marry Saul," he muttered.

"But, my dear boy, he is so vulgar, and he could not make her happy."

"Oh, she would be pretty comfortable, and it is selfish of her to study her inclinations rather than our need. Can't you persuade her to alter her decision?"

"I dare not say anything upon the subject. She has forbidden me to do so."

"She is like no other girl," he answered, slipping the coins into his pocket without so much as thanking Mrs. Erard for them.

"Well, mother, we must do the best we can; and, by the bye, you need not expect me back to-night. I shall sleep with a friend—Constance makes the home so deucedly unpleasant."

With a careless good-bye he left her, not to return again until all his stock of money was exhausted.

Meanwhile poor Constance set her face bravely towards the city. Women looked after the tall, beautiful girl with idle curiosity; men stared boldly into her face, and accosted her with words of insolent admiration. But she was not to be daunted; only she did wish that she could be a man for one moment to punish those who insulted her as they deserved.

"They all seem to know I am poor and friendless," she thought, bitterly, "and are not slow to take advantage of their knowledge!"

She went from one shop to another, asking the dealers to look at her pictures, but most of them answered they were overstocked already, and it would be merely a waste of time to go through her folio. But at last she found one who consented to do so, and she stood by with fast-beating heart whilst he tossed one after another crayon sketch or water-colour landscape aside. Constance's pictures were neither better nor worse than those of most girls, although partial critics amongst her own circle had praised them even fulsomely. There was no genius in them, and very little ability. So when the dealer had finished his inspection, he gathered them into a rough mass and tossed them into the portfolio.

"Very poor! very poor!" he said quickly. "You'll have to paint a deal better before you get anyone to buy. You'd better try some other line, young woman."

With a sinking heart she fastened the folio and went out. She was tired and faint; sick with dread of what lay before her; she was even glad when her eyes lit upon Saul's familiar face.

"Good gracious, Miss Erard!" he said loudly. "Why, are you here alone?"

"I have been out on business," she answered feebly, "and I am very tired."

"You look so; what I should call dead beat. Let me get you something?"

She negatived his suggestion, but she was so evidently exhausted that for once Timothy forgot his fears of her, and, drawing her hand within his arm, led her into a café, and making her sit down, called for a bottle of champagne. The generous wine soon brought the colour back to her face, and gave her fresh strength; she was able to notice Saul more particularly, and felt a little afraid of the quantity of wine he consumed. But it had no apparent effect upon him, and presently he turned to her with the question, "How are you going to reach your lodgings?"

"I shall walk," she answered, rising; "and so we had better part here; and thank you, Mr. Saul, for your kindness."

"Don't mention it; and as for walking, that's out of the question altogether! I consider I am responsible for your safety to your mother, so I'm going to get a cab and take you back to her."

He would not be gainsaid; and presently Constance found herself driving homewards with this man, who had always been her *dévo*. As they turned a corner somewhat sharply a gentleman drew back to the kerb, and looked fully into the girl's beautiful face. She shrank into her far corner, white and dazed by the look of contempt in Rolef's eyes.

"That fellow Sterling," said Saul, laughing; "he must have thought it odd seeing us together," but Constance was incapable of speech.

After that day she had many journeys to and fro. She tried hard to obtain music pupils; she applied for situations in schools, situations in shops, but all in vain. At the schools she was asked for references, and if she had been out before, and answering the last question in the negative was "declined with thanks." The shopkeepers asked how long she had been in the trade, and when she said she had no experience, they at once closed the interview by remarking that they took no hands who had not served an apprenticeship. Some said if she chose to give them a year, at the close of that period they would pay her five shillings a week. Disappointed, disgusted, she would return to her uncongenial surroundings, only to begin it all again on the morrow. At last she thought of her one talent, which she had never estimated very highly, and the next day she applied at a fancy shop for crawling or lace work, and at last she was successful. On paying a small deposit she was allowed to carry home a bundle of work. The remuneration would be small, but, as she said to herself, it would keep body and soul together, and she could hope for no more.

She rose early, and worked late, gaining a mere pittance, but never complaining; although she was often weary, and her head ached badly. Then, too, she had to listen to her mother's querulous complainings, and her brother's reproaches when he condescended to appear, which he never did until he needed money. Constance utterly refused to give any, but she was quite aware that her mother never permitted him to leave her empty-handed. One by one old familiar articles disappeared from their rooms; little trinkets her mother had often worn were never now seen, and the girl knew that Gaston had carried these off to Timothy Saul's.

Winter came on; provisions were dearer, and Mrs. Erard needed nourishing things, being in a feeble state of health; and Constance worked still harder, if, indeed, that were possible; and felt herself growing weaker. And, sometimes, when she sat working at night her head would swim, her heart beat fiercely against her side, and yet she dared not lay aside the delicate velvet on which she was creating flowers and figures; and if at times the tears filled her lovely, despairing eyes she dashed them impatiently away, as if ashamed of her emotion.

"I wonder," she would think, "if any of my old acquaintances would recognize me now? I wonder if I should be a welcome visitor in any of the old haunts? If Rolef were to meet me suddenly, I think he would scarcely believe I am Constance Erard. They used to call me proud. Oh! Heaven! I am proud no longer—only miserable, hopeless, old before my time."

The manager of the shop for which she worked had long been attracted by the charms of the mysterious workwoman; and often he annoyed her by his coarse and unwelcome attentions. But she was afraid to resent them lest she should lose her employment, and she said nothing to Mrs. Erard, knowing well she would receive no help from that quarter. But one evening, when she had received her work, and was walking home, the unwelcome admirer followed her, and placing himself beside her, adapted his pace to hers.

"Let me see you home, Miss Erard?" he said; "you're too pretty to be walking alone."

"I prefer my own society, thank you," she answered icily.

"Oh, that's all chaff," he said, with the insolent assurance which is the chief characteristic of the male shop assistant. "You girls always talk like that, just to make the fellows more eager after you."

"That is very possibly your experience," Constance said, still more frigidly. "But the women of whom you speak must have been rather peculiar."

He was nettled, but still determined to keep his temper under, and to thaw the icy woman. "Don't carry the joke too far," he said, laughing uneasily. "I might get savage, and if I did I've got power to harm you at head-quarters."

Her heart sank as she listened to the half-veiled threat, but pride was not dead within her yet, and she retorted: "If you choose to do so I shall be sorry; but may I remind you it is scarcely generous to threaten a helpless, friendless woman?"

"Now you're savage. Well, I don't mind; you look so thunderingly handsome in a rage. By Jove! how your eyes shine?"

She walked with head erect, and eyes looking steadfastly before her; and he, emboldened by her silence, and the desolation of the dark street, suddenly threw his arm about her, and strove to kiss the proud, sad face. In a moment she had wrenched herself free of him, and lifting her hand, had struck him fiercely across the mouth. He staggered back, and she hurried on; her heart burning with indignation. He hastened after her, and seized her by the wrist. "You tigress," he said, with an oath, "I'll make you suffer for this;" then he flung her away, and striding off, was soon hidden by the darkness.

Constance hurried home, sick and weary; never had she felt the humiliation of her lot so much as now—never had she been so wretched. But she could not confide in her mother; she must bear her burden alone, and none guessed the pain and anguish that filled her heart. She dared not look into the future; she was afraid that when she had finished her parcel, her persecutor would decline giving her more work, and then there would intrude the question—"What shall I do? Must I starve?"

It was now December, and Mrs. Erard was fast growing feebler. "Oh!" she would sigh, this place is killing me. Constance, if you had but been a good and sensible girl, even now we might have been happy. Do you think Rolef would come back to you if you wrote him?"

"Do not ask it, mother, dear. I could not remind him of our existence. He never had anything but pain through us; and now we are so fallen shall I write him I repent?"

"Yes, for my sake, and for poor Gaston's." The girl stirred wearily.

"You ask too much, mother; I can't do it?"

"You were always foolishly sentimental, and just because you could not feel the same love for him as he showed for you, you wantonly plunged us into poverty. Oh, Constance—oh, Constance! see how thin and weak I have grown! Won't you save me from death? You can, if you only will!"

The poor girl knelt beside her with hidden face.

"Spare me a little, mother!" she pleaded. "I am willing to work."

"Yes, yes," the invalid interrupted, peevishly; "but your work brings in so little; and it is horrible to think of a lady toiling as you do—living as you do, Constance! If you won't send for Rolef, at least give Mr. Saul some encouragement. He has been very good to Gaston, and would make you a kind husband, although he is a little vulgar. Promise to listen to him, for my sake!"

"Let me be; I must have time for thought. Oh! mother, you would not willingly condemn me to a life of misery?"

"We are miserable now, because we are poor; riches alone give happiness. And if you married Mr. Saul I could go to some warm place and recruit my strength. Perhaps he would even send me to the Riviera. He is generous with his money. But here I die daily—oh! Constance, don't you care?"

"Mother, you break my heart. Have I not always loved you? And lately I have worked for you gladly. I would die for you if my death would give you health and comfort. But to marry a man I loathe—oh, my dear!—oh, my dear! Leave me a little to myself. I—I cannot listen to your words; and she covered away with her face hidden in her hands, her lovely head bowed low.

Her grief touched even the weak, selfish nature of the elder woman.

"There, there!" she said, soothingly; "we will talk no more about the matter now; and pray, child, run into the next room. I can hear Gaston, and I think Mr. Saul is with him. Don't let him see you in tears. Men don't like crying women."

Constance needed no second bidding. She fled into the little room which served her and her mother for a bed-chamber, and there she remained until all traces of emotion had vanished from her face.

Then she joined the trio. Saul was wearing what he called his "company manners," and Constance was agreeably surprised at his quiet greeting.

"You are not looking very well, Miss Erard?" he said, with a glance of genuine pity at her. "I am afraid hard work doesn't suit you?"

"I am all right!" she answered, more graciously than usual; "but I am a little over-worked, and then mamma needs a great deal of nursing."

"And nourishing things, too! You must let me send you in a little port;" and before Constance could decline his offer Mrs. Erard

broke out into effusive thanks, which Saul said he neither desired nor deserved.

The next day, true to his promise, he sent in some rare old wine—jolly and fruit, and such things as invalids relish; and after that he called every morning, and was so deferential, yet distant in his manner towards Constance, that she began to lose her fear of him.

She finished her work, and carried it to the shop; and contrary to her fears she received another parcel, but the manager severely reprimanded the carelessness (?) she had shown in her last task.

"It won't do, Miss Erard," he said, offensively. "Either the work must be high-class, or we must find someone to take your place."

She knew he spoke from malice only, but she dared not say so. She was afraid to "quarrel with her bread."

Early in the New Year Mrs. Erard grew so rapidly worse that she was compelled to keep her bed; and, although Constance worked early and late, she could not finish the order to time.

When she took it in she received the money due to her, and a curt dismissal.

"What should she do?" was the question which racked heart and brain alike; but for the poor, weak woman, so utterly dependent on her, she would have yielded to the temptation to throw herself into the turbid depths of the river.

But she must be brave a little longer yet; but oh! how weary she was of it all. Should she never again know the sweetness of rest and peace?

She said nothing to her mother of this new calamity, and tried to appear calm as usual, and when Mrs. Erard wondered at her unwonted indolence she merely said,—

"There is no work doing at the shop this week, dear; but do not fret, you shall want for nothing."

"Then you mean you will marry Mr. Saul?"

"No; I mean my purse isn't quite empty yet, mother, and to-morrow I will seek for work elsewhere."

But on the morrow, and for many days Mrs. Erard was so weak that Constance dared not leave her for any lengthened period, and the little purse was growing lamentably lighter. One morning Constance found she had but a shilling left, and for a moment even her courage failed her.

Only for a moment; then she dressed herself, and, asking the landlady to sit with her mother, went out. She was not gone long, and when she returned she went and knelt by the invalid.

"Dear," she said, gently and lightly, "I am afraid you will be angry with me. I have had all my hair cut off; it made my head ache so dreadfully."

"Oh, Constance, all your lovely hair! And you used to be so proud of it! Are you sure you did not do it for my sake?"

"Yes, dear," she answered, not flushing as she lied, because she believed the falsehood excusable. "Lately my head has ached day after day."

"And your heart too, Constance!" said the mother, sorrowfully. "And what have you done with your hair?"

"Sold it. What use had I for it? And the money will be needed."

"You are always thinking of me," with sudden self-reproach, "and I haven't been a good mother to you. I can see that now, and if I could go back a few years I should be glad. I have never consulted your wishes; I have often wronged you. I shall not wrong you any more!"

She was so gentle, so unlike the mother Constance had known in all her twenty years, that the girl clung about her in sudden love and fear. How wasted the small hands were, how sunken the pale blue eyes!

"Mother! mother!" she said, "don't trouble yourself with such thoughts now. Perhaps if I had been less proud, less arrogant, we might have been happier."

"Connie," caressingly, "did you never care for Rolfe Sterling?"

"Oh, mother, don't! When I think of him my heart is almost broken."

"Then why did you break your engagement? Did you quarrel?"

"No, no; but rest assured he is not the one to blame; but something happened which would always prevent our union. It is neither his fault nor mine, but only our great and irremediable misfortune."

That night, when Constance had fallen into an uneasy slumber before the fire, she was suddenly aroused by a light touch, and starting found her mother sitting erect in her bed.

"What is it, dear?" she asked, encircling the wasted form with her arms. "It is not time for your medicine yet. Are you not so well?"

"Quick, quick; there is no time to be lost. Send a telegram to your uncle Will; tell him I am dying, and he will forgive all my pride and coldness. He will be a good friend to you. Send for Gaston, too," and then the weary eyes closed, and she lay back swooning amongst her pillows.

The landlady's boy ran to Gaston's lodgings; but it was too late to send the telegram to Mrs. Erard's brother; they must wait until the morning.

Gaston had gone to bed intoxicated, and it would have been useless to attempt to wake him, so Constance sat by her mother alone all through the weary hours of the long winter night.

Mrs. Erard lay unconscious, and only her gasping breaths broke the dreadful silence; but about eight o'clock in the morning the blue eyes opened, and a feeble hand went out to meet her daughter's. The girl was ashen white, and her beautiful mouth was tremulous.

"Oh, mother! mother!" she said, in a wild access of grief, "tell me I am not to blame? Perhaps if I had married Mr. Saul you would be strong and well."

"No, no," the dying woman said, feebly; "and, child—oh, my child!—never become the wife of a man you do not love? If I had but been true to my own heart your father would have been a more contented man; I should have been a better woman. Is your uncle coming?"

"The telegram has gone, mother, and I have sent for Gaston."

"Oh, poor Gaston! Be good to him when I am dead; he has no one to care for him but me. No other could see the good that lay hidden in him, no other sympathise with him as I did; and I believe he loves me as devotedly as I have always loved him."

Poor, trusting, foolish heart! The devoted son had received her message, being roused by his landlady for that purpose.

"Oh!" he said sleepily, "that's all right; the old woman is worth twenty dead ones yet. It's only a fad of hers to believe herself going." And he turned again to his drunken slumbers.

At noon Mr. Maple arrived. He was a bluff, hearty man of about fifty, a Berkshire squire, of whom, in her palmy days, his sister had been greatly ashamed. But she welcomed him now with eager, outstretched hands.

"Well," she said, "I wonder you came to me so soon. I have behaved badly to you;" and there were tears in the faded eyes.

"Let bygones be bygones, Amy," he answered gently. "Maybe I was too harsh with you. I am but a rough, blunt man at the best, and perhaps I said more than I should have done the last time we met. Well, this is my niece, I suppose. My dear, if you are as good as you are handsome, you'll make some man happy at a time not far distant. Now, if you don't mind leaving us, my child, I shall be glad, as we have a deal to talk over."

In the conversation which ensued Mr. Maple discovered much that redounded to his niece's credit; but he wondered not a little why she, who seemed so good and true in all other things, could have dealt so capriciously with

Rolfe Sterling. At last he came to the conclusion that Gaston was at the bottom of the mystery, and his contemptuous dislike of his nephew increased momentarily.

At noon Mrs. Erard joined the "great majority;" and five minutes later Gaston lounged in. He was confronted by Mr. Maple, who eyed him with great disfavour.

"So you have come at last," he said harshly. "You scarcely expected to find me here? Did you not get your sister's message?"

"Yes; and I came as soon as could. I should like to see my mother now."

"You will find her in there"—pointing to the adjoining room. "You have come too late."

It was after the funeral, and Mr. Maple sat with Constance and Gaston in the little dingy room the girl had so long called home.

"What I have to say," he broke out, after an uncomfortable silence, "can be said in a very few words. I intend taking you, my dear (and here he possessed himself of Constance's hand), home with me. If you can put up with my bachelor ways and blunt manners, you're heartily welcome. I can't say the same to you, Gaston, for I'm afraid you'll always be a bad, lazy fellow, and we don't entertain scamps at Fortress Hall. But I won't leave you exposed to temptation, for Amy's sake; so here, I'll give you a start," and he placed some notes on the table, amounting in all to a hundred pounds; "and if you'll promise to reform, I'll find you a situation suitable to your birth. The furniture your sister has generously offered to make entirely over to you—so you start fair and square. Now, my lad, it rests with yourself whether or no you share what I have with Constance at my death. So let me hear a good report of you."

Gaston's face was a study, so black was it with hate and rage. He pocketed the notes, and, with an oath, turned towards the door. But Constance stayed him.

"Gaston, dear Gaston," she said, "for our mother's sake speak kindly to me. Let me hope a new and better life dawning for us both."

He thrust her away, making use of such words that Mr. Maple started forward with clenched hands, ready to administer the well-deserved chastisement. But Gaston saved himself by a precipitate flight.

At night he returned to find the apartments deserted; so he ransacked all the drawers and shelves, and in one of the former he found a journal, kept by his sister, and which she had forgotten in her hasty departure. He carefully laid it aside, thinking that it might be of some use to him; and the next morning he called in a broker, and disposed of all the little property. Constance's journal he carried to his old lodgings, and looking it up, smiled grimly.

"If I'm ever down on my luck again, that will be a mine of wealth to me."

He went out to meet his boon companions, to gamble and drink away the money so generously given Mr. Maple.

CHAPTER IV.

GASTON ERARD was at the end of his resources; he had begged and borrowed of his old friends and acquaintances until he could beg and borrow no more. He had applied again and again to Timothy Saul for assistance; and Timothy, grown impatient by his demands, at last turned sharply upon him.

"Look here, Erard, you've had any amount of hard cash from me; but you never advanced my cause a bit; you never did anything to earn your wage, and I'm sick of the connection. I tell you I mean to rise in life; I mean to be a great swell before I die; and so it won't do for me to be seen with you. You're not in very good favour with the West-end nobles. No, I won't give you another penny; if I happened to be a harsh sort of fellow, I should

ask you to refund the money you've had, but I'll let you off that. And now you can get out of the office as soon as you like; and if you show your face here again, I'll have you kicked out."

So Gaston turned his back upon Timothy, and went to his lodgings in a very sullen state of mind. Once there, however, his face brightened, and going to a cupboard he unlocked it, and took out Constance's journal. "This will do the business," he said with a chuckle, and once more putting on his hat he started for Rolef's chambers. Here he was confronted by Dawson, who informed him that Mr. Sterling could see no one, as he was very busy, preparing for a long journey.

"Then there is the greater reason that he should see me. Tell him I bring him good news."

Dawson disappeared, to return in a few minutes. "You can go up, sir," he said, and watched Gaston with curious eyes until he entered Rolef's sitting-room. "What does he want now with the master?" he said to himself. "No good, I'll be bound. Most likely he wants to borrow a five-pound note."

Gaston found Rolef busy with some papers; he looked up and spoke curtly.

"What is it, Erard? I hope you will not detain me long."

"Not long. I know I am an unwelcome guest since I fell upon hard times. But I didn't come to tell you a fact that is patent to all. I want to know, Sterling, if you ever heard my sister's reason for giving you your *compé*?"

The young man's face flushed.

"I should prefer that Miss Erard's name should be left out of the conversation."

"But I have a serious purpose in asking. I know there has been some misunderstanding. Just deal fairly with me, Sterling, and I'll return the compliment."

"Well," reluctantly, "I am as ignorant of the cause of our rupture as the greatest stranger could be."

"She is a queer sort of girl, and always was. But I am ready to swear she loves you still, and never cared more for you than she did at the time we are speaking of."

"I am scarcely likely to believe such a statement, and cannot divine your motive for making it. If you think to impose upon my gullibility you have made a sad mistake; your unsupported word, will not convince me."

"But if I can prove she was always true at heart, that if her sex would permit she would come to you now and beg for your love?"

Rolef was silent a moment; then he said huskily, "Can you prove this?"

"I can; but I'm awfully down on my luck, and can't afford to play the good Samaritan. I must be paid, and liberally too, for my services."

"If you can give me back my lost happiness you shall have whatever sum you choose to demand."

"Well, then, I say a hundred and fifty; you ought not to grumble at that."

"I don't," curtly; "now for the proofs."

Gaston drew out the journal. "Don't ask how I came by this; be glad that it fell into my hands. And one thing more before I give this up. You will find a statement in it concerning me—I have your promise to keep the secret—otherwise I take the papers away again."

"I promise; and here are the notes," and gathering them up Gaston went out—went out to a life of sin and shame; to sink lower and lower with each succeeding year; to lose all trace of refinement or respectability, until at last he married a woman who kept a low public-house, where sailors were entertained and cheated. From that day he was lost to all friends and relatives; only occasionally an appeal for money would reach Constance, and the writer would lament that he had married one so far beneath him; and who, in addition to her low birth, was a terrible virago.

When Gaston had gone, Rolef opened the

journal, feeling not a little guilty, as he saw this was the record of Constance's thoughts. Several leaves appeared to have been torn away, and it commenced on the day following their engagement.

March 18th.—To-night Rolef told me he loved me, and implored me to marry him. I had tried to guard against this declaration; endeavoured to disgust him with my coldness, but all to no purpose. And when he threw his arm about me and kissed my mouth all my courage left me, and against my conscience, in opposition to my better judgment, I gave him the promise he asked. Oh! what a weak and wicked woman I am! I have given myself to him under false pretences; he believes us to be comfortably situated; he thinks Gaston is only a little wild, and I know that our means are inadequate for our wants, that my brother is a gambler and a *roué*. If only I dared tell him all! But having tasted his love, how can I bear to lose it? If I told him my story, would he not think I had accepted him only for what he has.

May 14th.—Once or twice I have spoken to mamma about my engagement, and have begged her to end it for me. How can I marry Rolef, knowing what I know? Already mamma has arranged that she shall live with us, and I am to make an allowance to Gaston out of my *pin-money*. Oh my love, oh my love! how can I deceive you so deeply, how can I wrong you so cruelly? To-day Rolef has been with me; he brought me a ruby set, and I longed to thrust it back upon him; I feel so unworthy of his gifts and goodness. I was so cold and constrained that he questioned me scorchingly as to the cause of my coldness, and I dared tell him nothing. My life grows harder day by day, the way is thornier to tread. I try to convince my darling of my worthlessness; I do my heart great wrong each time we meet. I feign a coldness that I cannot feel. Oh Heaven! oh Heaven! how shall I bear this life longer?

May 29th.—Oh! how can I write the dreadful truth? I wonder that I am not mad with my misery; I wonder I can think, and move and act, as though no calamity had befallen me. Sweetheart, good-bye; for us there can be no morning; the night has closed round us—the night that knows no ending. Only to-day I was glad; this morning, carried away by all genial influences, I allowed Rolef to see how dear he is to me; I resolved to cast all doubts, all fears behind, and to be happy with my darling. After he had left me, I sat alone in the drawing-room, waiting for Gaston. When I heard his impatient knocking at the door, and went down to admit him, he staggered by me and I saw that he was in the last stage of intoxication. I bolted the door and followed him upstairs, when he demanded wine, and as I refused to give it, he, seeing I was in earnest, submitted to my will. He drew out a pocket-book, asking me to take charge of it, and I carried it to my room! Shall I ever forget my horror when I recognised the silver clasps, and, stooping, read the name of my lover. I knew then, in one awful moment, that my brother was a thief, and that by his crime I was for ever cut off from Rolef's love. Oh, my broken heart! oh, my broken heart! And only this morning I was glad!

May 29th.—To-day I sold my ornaments, even my betrothal ring, and enclosing the money received from Timothy Saul in the pocket-book, I managed to return it to Rolef. Heaven grant he may never guess who was the thief.

June 1st.—It is all ended now. He and I stand apart for ever. I have written him that our engagement was all a mistake, that I can never be his wife. What must he think when I retain his gifts?—at least he will believe I retain them. Oh! this is worse than all. I cannot bear his contempt—my heart will break! Oh! kind Heaven, let me die!

There was only one other entry. It ran thus:—

December 9th.—Mother is fading fast, and with all my efforts I cannot maintain her in

comfort. I am weak and giddy often; my strength fails me, and often I am afraid that I shall sink under the burden laid upon me. Every day mother urges Timothy Saul's suit upon me; but how can I give myself to a man I loathe? Oh, Rolef! Rolef! you are well avenged!

The young man buried his face in his arms.

"My poor darling! my poor darling! How I have wronged you! By what act can I atone for my harshness?" Then he started up, intent upon finding her, until he remembered he did not know where she had hidden herself. With feverish fingers he turned the pages of her journal, and at last his search was rewarded by finding an address written by Gaston, at the foot of a note, "Miss Erard, Fortness Hall, Fortness, Berkshire."

He called Dawson.

"I shall not start for France to-morrow. Probably my journey will be indefinitely postponed. I am compelled to leave town at once on urgent business, and if I don't return to-night I will telegraph my address to you, so that you may forward me any letters that may arrive."

Half-an-hour later he was on his way to Fortness; his heart beating quick and hard with his sudden joy. She loved him! She had always loved him! and he could not doubt that she would forgive him what he chose to call his sin against her!

Would you know the sequel of his journey? It is to be found in an entry made by Constance in her diary that night.

June 1st.—Just a year ago to-day since I thought my whole life blighted—since I prayed that I might die because I had lost the only treasure I prized. And to think that now I am one of the happiest women on earth is at present incomprehensible. To-day I had been into the village, and returning home was met by my dear uncle (for whose great goodness I can never be sufficiently grateful). He took my face between his hands, and kissed me. "You're a good girl, Constance," he said, praising me generously, "and you deserve to be happy. Now, go into my den, there is some one waiting to see you."

"Who is it?" I asked, fearing to hear his answer. I dreaded lest Gaston should have followed me. "Tell me, uncle—is is the visitor objectionable?"

"I think not, and he brings you news of your old life—your old friends. Oh, by the way, Rolef Sterling is soon to be married."

I felt choking, but I tried not to show my pain, and, gathering all my courage together, I entered uncle's favourite room. Some one rose to meet me, some one spoke my name. I cried out, "Why have you come to torture me; is it well done?" and tried to thrust Rolef away. But he held me close, and when he had done kissing me broke out with a happy laugh.

"Yes, I am soon to be married, Constance, and the woman I shall call my wife is now in my arms. Sweetheart, can you forgive me?"

And it was I who needed forgiveness; but I could only cling to him weeping for very joy. Half-an-hour later uncle joined us.

"Heaven bless you dear," he huskily said, "you will be a happy woman. I rejoice in your gladness. But, oh! Constance, how I shall miss you."

[THE END.]

FANCY plays like a squirrel in its circular prison, and is happy; but imagination is a pilgrim on the earth, and her home is in heaven. Shut her from the fields of the celestial mountains, bar her from breathing their lofty sun-warmed air, and we may as well turn upon her the last bolt of the tower of famine, and give the keys to the keeping of the surge that washes Capraja and Gorgona.

FACETIE.

SHE: "That was a very annoying blunder I made last night, in sitting Miss B— next to Miss C— at dinner. It was too stupid of me." He: "Why?" She: "Because they haven't spoken for years. They belong to the same choir."

"Do you know that short moustaches like mine are all the rage now?" asked a Boho youth of his girl. "No—are they?" she replied. "Yes; they are the latest things out." "I might have known that, too, for if they are like yours they haven't been out long."

HORN, clerk: "Front, go to Earl Halldon's apartments, and see what he wants." Bell-boy (returning): "He wants you to call him early to-morrow morning." Hotel clerk: "Wants me to call him early? Well, he's getting familiar on short acquaintance, seems to me."

DUMLEY: (gastronomically excited). "I think we are going to have duck for dinner, Featherly. I heard the landlady ask the boy if he had brought the canvas-back." Featherly: "I saw it. It wasn't a canvas-back duck." Dumley: "No?" Featherly: "No; it was a canvas-back ham."

At the powder magazine. Sentry: "Throw away that cigar." Stranger: "But it isn't even lit." "That makes no difference; throw it away." "All right; but is it really so dangerous to smoke in this vicinity?" "Dangerous to smoke! Why it ain't even safe to take a pinch of snuff!"

He was a nobby young man of blue blood and good financial backing, and as he sat down in the tram he pulled out his handkerchief, and gave his nose a princely wipe. An odour of perfume was wafted through the car, and a boy sitting beside his mother suddenly called out: "Say, ma, why can't we buy onions which smell as nice as that?"

"What's the matter, Bobby?" inquired his mother, as the boy flounced into the nursery. "Pa—sent me out of the l—library c—cause I made too much n—noise." "I hope you didn't say anything rude to your papa?" "N—no!" replied Bobby, who knows better than to be rude to an old man; "but I slammed the door."

"That sixpence is only worth threepence," said the groceryman to Johnny. "How's that?" "It's got a hole in it." "So a hole in a sixpence is good for threepence." "Just so." "Then give it back to me. I'll punch another hole in it; and then it will be worth sixpence. I'll punch six holes in it, and then it will be worth three shillings. I'll have money to throw away to the birds pretty soon."

AN ILLEGAL TRANSACTION.—Young girl's father: "You here again?" Young man: "Yes; I believe I am." Young girl's father: "I thought I put you out a few days ago?" Young man: "Yes; that was on election day—November Third." Young girl's father: "What's that got to do with it?" Young man: "I've been looking up the law, and I find that business transacted on a legal holiday is illegal."

EDITH: "What a lonesome spot a social gathering is where one is such a stranger!" HAROLD: "It is, indeed, 'pon honour, doncher know." EDITH: "I don't know what I should have done but for you. You are the oasis of the evening's desert." HAROLD: "Really, I am beholden to you, Miss Edith." EDITH: "Yes, dear Harold! you are the evening's oasis—the one green spot in the dreary waste."

Nor long since Gus De Smith took a stroll through the Austin graveyard. When he came out of the graveyard he looked very serious. Gilboly, meeting him, asked what was the matter. "Nothing, only I was thinking that the Austin husband must light all the fires in the mornings." "What makes you think so?" "Well, I see so many of them are burned to death. I noticed on three or four tombstones, 'Peace to his ashes.'"

SHOE-DRALER (to partner): "That new lot of French slippers is going very slowly. Hadn't we better mark them down?" Partner: "Yes; mark the five down to three, and the four to two." The change was made, and in a day or two the stock was exhausted.

WHY SHE DETESTED MUSIC.—"Then you are not going to attend the concert course this winter, Cicely, dear?" inquired her friend. "Certainly I am, my dear. Why should you think I don't like to go to concerts?" "I thought you detested music. You've often said so." "Ah, yes, but that was for fear you would offer to play for the fiftieth time Mendelssohn's 'Songs without Words.'"

HE WANTED PROOF.—A man entered a bank and presented a cheque which read: "Pay to bearer the sum of three pounds. The cashier took the cheque, looked at it and said: "The cheque is perfectly good; but you'll have to get some one to identify you." "What is the use?" the man replied. "Don't you see that it says, 'Pay to bearer'?" "Yes, but you must prove that you are the bearer."

VICTOR, WILL, NOT, BUY A WEDDING-RING.—"Victor," said the young man with hair evenly balanced, "I have come to-night to ask you a question that has been on my mind for weeks." "Well, Victor," said the shy goddess, "I am anxious to know if you would take me for better or for worse?" "Well, Victor, to look at you I should say worse?" Victor is single yet.

A STRANGER who was quietly looking over a water-power in a Western village was sought out by the mayor, who said: "I hear you think of starting a factory?" "Yes." "It's a good place, and you'll find our people all right. We don't put on any great amount of style, nor don't aim to. Here's a pair of braces I have worn for over forty years, though I'm worth fifty thousand pounds." "Ah! um!" muttered the stranger. "But it was a brace of factories I was thinking to start here."

A FEW evenings ago a fine-looking, well-dressed negro, as black as black can be, entered a drug store and enquired, semi-confidentially, of the clerk: "Do you keep lampblack?" "I can give you some," was the reply. "How much do you want?" "Well, you see, sah—Oh, is it very nice?" I would like a little, sah, in a pretty box—like these," (pointing at boxes containing toilet articles in the showcase). "Well," said the clerk, dubiously, "I dunno. What do you want it for?" "For de toilet, sah—for my wife. She powdahs, sah."—*American Paper.*

PAINTFUL SURRENDER.—One of the swell young men who appeared in the street the other day, arrayed in the new-fashioned cape-overcoat, was halted in Regent street by a pedestrian, who hurriedly said: "Say, you, if you are coachman to the fat lady who went into that shop, you'd better get your rig around as soon as possible, for she's fainted away, and there's half-a-dozen clerks out looking for you." The swell young man had no good place to drop on, and so he leaned against a telegraph pole until the shivers had ceased running up and down his spine.

THE advance agent of barn-storming Wizard had just landed in the country editor's office. "I want an ad. in your paper," he said. "What for?" asked the editor. "For the greatest and only living prestidigitateur. He can do anything and everything—change water into wine, and wine into water; take a twenty-pound note out of a cat's mouth; take a ten out of a turnip; take a fiver out of a man's hat, every time he puts his hand in, and so on." "Do all that, can he?" queried the editor. "You bet he can, and not half try." "Can he take a shilling out of an editor's pocket?" "Course he can—a hundred of them, for that matter." "Well, he's the man I'm looking for; and if he will teach me how I can do it, I'll be darned if he can't have his ad. in every column of my newspaper free, and I'll get out a supplement besides."

NOTHING NEW ABOUT IT.—Dumbliding was aroused about 2 a.m. by the violent ringing of the door-bell. "What's the trouble?" he exclaimed, jamming his head out of the window. "Come quick to the station-house and go bail for your son-in-law!" "No, I won't." "But, sir, your daughter is nearly distracted." "Pooh! There's nothing new about that. If she hadn't been distracted she would never have married that fellow."

TESTING HIS BRAVERY.—"Harry," she said, "if a fire were to break out suddenly in the house, what would be your first impulse, do you think?" "Well, my first thought would be for you, of course. I would get you to a place of safety, and then do what I could to extinguish the flames." "That would be very nice of you, Harry, to think of me first; but if a fire were to break out now, for instance, wouldn't you lose valuable time reaching me from such a long way across the room?"

Roots.

It ain't so much for the want of an opportunity that men fail, it is for the lack of grab and grip when the opportunity comes swimming along.

There is pedantry in all things that men and women do; the world is full of it. Except perhaps the old-fashioned doublet and hose, I rather think that is an honest and square job, with no pedantry in it.

There is this grate art in contentment, "to be better satisfied with what you haven't got, than with what you have."

There are but very few questions that I will argue with any man; a mere difference of opinion proves nothing. But when a man undertakes to make me believe, in figures, that 4 and 2 make 8, I am going to set up all night with that phellow.

Prosperity teaches us nothing; and, when we won't learn from adversity, how can we help being phools?

Grate bravery is one of the stalwart virtues, but we don't have a half-a-dozen chances in our whole life to exercise it; while common civility hangs around us all day long, ready, at a moment's notice, to run on some errand of kindness for us.

Those people who have the least trouble in borrowing all they want are the ones who seldom, if ever, want to borrow at all.

The man who has set down quietly and think, has a pension for his old age as good as gold.

Infidels, free thinkers, deists, and the devil—hall phellows well met—seem to believe everything but the Bible.

It is not necessary that a man who walks on the ice should slip up, nor is it necessary that a cunning man should become a liar, but they both are taking the right kind of risks, to slip up, and to lie too.

Very grate conversationists make but few friends, they out-talk, and at the same time outshine others too much.

Deference is the most elegant of all compliments, and most generally is nothing else but a compliment.

Creeds are sacred things, but the shorter the better.

Cunning is not necessarily a vice, but very often can be found comparing notes with it.

Tell me all about a man's virtues, and I will tell you what kind of a pedigree he has got.

Every one praises an opportune shower, a soft wind, a starlit night, an evening rainbow, and why? They can't make one themselves.

Very few people ever ask advice for the sake of following it; they do it to have their own opinions endorsed; and this is the best kind of advice to follow every now.

Affectation is worse than ignorance, and more plenty. It is better to know nothing on any subject than to know what ain't so.

Old acquaintances, like old cheese, are the strongest; but we must now and then have a new one, for we may outlive all the old ones.

JOHN BILLINGS.

SOCIETY.

THE Queen, just before leaving Windsor for Osborne, sent Mrs. Hall, of Windsor, a beautifully constructed Bath chair, with a message wishing Mrs. Hall "A happy New Year," and hoping that she might live many years to enjoy its use. Mrs. Hall was for many years nurse to Her Majesty's children.

THE Princess of Wales has presented to Mme. de Falbe a framed copy of the photographed group taken at Luton Hoo. In it nearly all the ladies appear wearing as button-holes the tiny floral arrangements made of plait given them by representative workers of Strawopolis. The Princess herself is carrying a very lovely bouquet, the holder of which is a chaste fabrication of straws known as English moss, raised in beautiful little tips to closely imitate nature. The top, or brim, is worked into bay leaves, and a loyal milliner has given it a finishing touch with a border of lace. The bouquet itself is composed wholly of crochids—nineteen of the choicest varieties grown, including *Odontoglossum Alexandrinum*, *Lælia autumnalis*, *Oncidium Cavendishianum*, and *Dendrobium heterocarpum*. The photo is an excellent one, and the faces come out with exquisite clearness.

THE Prince of Wales presided recently over an influential meeting of noblemen, and civic and county representatives in the Banqueting Hall of St. James's Palace, in support of the movement to establish an Imperial Institute in commemoration of the Queen's Jubilee year. His Royal Highness delivered an address, in the course of which he said his desire was that the proposed institution should be an emblem of the unity of the Empire, and should illustrate the resources of every part of Her Majesty's dominions. Resolutions were adopted approving the scheme, and appealing to the public for support.

A DISTINGUISHED congregation assembled in the Chapel Royal, Savoy, on the occasion of the marriage of Capt. the Hon. Alfred J. G. Byng (7th Hussars), fifth son of the late Earl of Strafford, and the Lady Winifred Herbert, eldest daughter of the Earl of Carnarvon. The invitations were limited in number, owing to the recent death of the bridegroom's father, but by three o'clock, the hour appointed for the ceremony, the beautiful little chapel, which has been lately decorated, was filled with the relatives and friends of the contracting couple. Major H. Paget (7th Hussars) acted as best man.

The bride came at three o'clock, accompanied by her father, the Earl of Carnarvon, who afterwards gave her away. She wore a dress of cream white satin, made with a long plain train; the petticoat being edged with a tulle pleating, in which small satin bows were arranged, and draped with exquisite Brussels lace, a cascade of which fell gracefully down one side; on the bodice some of the same lace was gathered into the shoulders, and caught in front with a cluster of orange blossoms. She wore a very narrow wreath of orange blossoms in her hair, and a Brussels lace veil (the Countess of Carnarvon's gift), which was fastened by a diamond and pearl crescent, given her by the bridegroom's mother, and a diamond spray, the gift of Lady Stephen. Her other ornaments included a pearl and diamond pendant and bracelet, the gifts of the Earl and Countess of Derby.

The four bridesmaids were the Ladies Margaret and Victoria Herbert, her sisters, and the Ladies Elizabeth and Margaret Byng, sisters of the bridegroom. They were dressed in simply-made costumes of cream Sicilienne, the bodices being bordered round the throat, wrists, and *basques* with beaver fur; and the elder ladies wore bonnets, and the younger hats of the same silk, bound with beaver-coloured velvet and trimmed with balls of beaver fur. Each wore a pearl bangle (the bridegroom's gift), and carried a bouquet of pink and white flowers.

STATISTICS.

AN orange tree will bear fruit till 150 years old, and there are recorded instances of orange trees bearing when 500 years old. One in Rome has been bearing 675 years; another was planted in 1278. One in Seville is 520 years, and others in different parts of Spain are 350 years old. In Malta and Naples 15,000 oranges have been picked from one single tree, and Mr. C. H. Wilcox tells of one in the Sandwich Islands that was estimated to bear 20,000. In two instances in Southern Europe 38,000 were picked from one tree.

THE BOOKS OF THE PAST YEAR.—The number of new books published in the year just closed was 8,984, and of new editions, 1,226—a total of 5,210. This is a falling-off of more than 400 from the publications of the year 1885, which were 5,640 in number. Messrs. Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, publish an analytical table of the books published during the year. The table is divided into fourteen classes, and the numbers of each are as follows:—Theology, including sermons, 752; educational, 572; juvenile works and tales, 445; novels, 969; law and kindred subjects, 38; political and social economy, trade, and commerce, 246; art, science, and illustrated works, 178; voyages and travels, 221; history and biography, 350; poetry and the drama, 93; year books and serials, 294; medicine and surgery, 171; belles-lettres, essays, and monographs, 479; and miscellaneous, 407.

GEMS.

LOVING souls are very similar to paupers. They live upon what is given to them.

"We never see a tear in the eye," says a celebrated writer, "but we are reminded of a warm heart."

FRIENDS should be very delicate and careful in administering pity as a medicine, when enemies use the same article as poison.

SORRY words may appease an angry man—bitter words never will. Would you throw fuel on a house in flames in order to extinguish the fire?

A BEAUTIFUL form is better than a beautiful face; a beautiful behaviour, is better than a beautiful form; it gives a higher pleasure than statues or pictures; it is the finest of the fine arts.

THE truth cannot be burned, beheaded or crucified. A lie on the throne is a lie still, and truth in a dungeon is a truth still; and a lie on the throne is on the way to defeat, and truth in a dungeon is on the way to victory.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

WELSH RABBIT.—Grate cheese, put it in a pan with cream and bread crumbs, salt and pepper; let all stew together until it becomes the right thickness.

STEWED GIBLETS.—Soak the giblets, and put them in a stewpan with a few pieces of cold veal or chicken, a few button mushrooms, a little lemon juice, a glass of white wine, pepper and salt, and a little good gravy; stew slowly till quite tender. Some small forcemeat balls, added a few minutes before serving, are a great improvement. Garnish the dish with thin slices of hard-boiled eggs.

STEWED FISH WITH TOMATOES.—Peel off in slices three or four fine large tomatoes, put them in a saucepan with a teaspoonful of finely-chopped onion, a dessertspoonful of salad oil, and a little cayenne pepper and salt; simmer them gently for half-an-hour, then lay in the fish (a pair of soles, or a small plaice), adding a little water if there is not sufficient liquor to cook them. Beat up the yolk of an egg with the juice of a lemon, and five minutes before dishing the fish pour it in, and shake the saucepan to prevent curdling.

MISCELLANEOUS.

MAN's highest virtue always is as much as possible to rule external circumstances, and as little as possible to let himself be ruled by them. Life lies before us like a large quarry before the architect; he deserves not the name of architect, except out of this fortuitous quarry he can combine with the greatest economy, staidness, and durability, some form, the pattern of which originated in his own soul. All things without us—nay, I may add, all things within us—are mere elements; but deep in the inmost shrine of our nature lies the creative force, which out of these can produce what they were meant to form and which leaves us neither sleep nor rest, till in one way or another, without us or within us, this product has taken shape.

JAPANESE ETIQUETTE.—The difference of national interpretations of etiquette are comically illustrated in a little history told by a lady in Washington society. A Japanese gentleman called on her one day just before luncheon. As it was a first, and, presumably, ceremonious call, she naturally expected it would be brief. To her surprise he accepted her invitation to lunch, and that domestic rite over, he still stayed. The hours wore on and he did not go. The lady was weary beyond endurance. Dinner-time came. The lady's husband returned, and still the gentleman from Japan stayed on. He was as a matter of necessity invited to dinner. Finally, the gentleman of the house relieved his wife for a time in entertaining this apparently stationary visitor, but as the evening wore on he became so tired and sleepy that he retired to his own apartment, and the hostess again screwed her courage to the sticking point and resumed the entertainment of the guest. At last, about midnight, the Japanese, with the most elaborate and abject apologies to the lady for leaving her, reluctantly took his departure. But the comedy reached its denouement the next day, when a friend, in whom the extraordinary guest had confided, told the hostess that he said he never had such an ordeal in his life; that he was so tired, and he thought the lady would never let him go, and then finally he was obliged to leave her without her permission. Then the hostess learned that in Japanese etiquette the lady receiving a gentleman gives him the signal for his departure, and it is very rude in their code to leave her till she does this.

WHERE RAIN COMES FROM.—Did it ever occur to the reader that there is just as much water in the air above him on a clear, bright day as on a cloudy or rainy one? Rain does not come from somewhere else, or it is waited over you by the wind from somewhere else, the water that was over you is simply waited on to some other place. Water is absorbed in the air above us at a certain temperature, and it becomes insensible. Cool that air by a wind draught of cooler atmosphere, or by electrical or chemical influence, and the moment the air becomes cooler it gives up some of the watery particles that were insensible or invisible to the higher temperature. These small particles thus given out unite, and when enough of them coalesce, obstruct the light and show as clouds. When enough of them unite to be too heavy to float in the air, they begin to descend; pair after pair of them come down together until a raindrop is formed. One of these minute raindrops is made up of millions of infinitely small watery particles. Air passing over the cold tops of mountains is cooled down so that it gives up a good deal of the concealed watery vapour, and hence little rain falls in the region along the side of such mountains. This is why so little rain falls in Colorado and in other places north and south of that State. The prevailing winds blow from the west, and the cool tops of the Rocky Mountains lower their temperature, and thus take out the moisture that otherwise falls in rain.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

EVA G.—Palm Sunday in 1870 came on the 8th of April.
D. V. V.—Guitau is pronounced as if spelt *gee-to*.
L. C. C.—Gen. Garibaldi died at Caprera, Italy, on June 28, 1882, aged 77.

A. H.—Both October 18th, 1886, and August 31st, 1889, fell on Wednesday.

C. P. P.—Charlotte Cushman, the distinguished actress, died in 1876. She was born in 1816.

R. T. S.—The Ring Theatre at Vienna, Austria, was burned on Dec. 8, 1881. Number of lives lost 794.

P. N.—We cannot recommend the remedy mentioned. Corns are best treated by the ordinary methods.

L. D. W.—The average speed of the steamship *City of Rome*, the largest passenger steamer afloat, is stated to be 17½ miles an hour.

A. F. S.—The day known in Wall Street, New York, as Black Friday, when the great gold panic was precipitated, was Sept. 24, 1869.

K. W. D. P.—You write a really excellent hand. Its clear, open, regular characters would indicate that you are generous, neat, and prudent, without being cold.

M. M.—It is impossible for us to tell all the coloured paints used in a painting we never have seen. Paints are mixed in order to get proper shades, and we doubt if the painter himself could answer your question.

N. D.—The prefix *Mac* to a name, as Macdonald, means, originally, son. Macdonald was the son of Donald, but it gradually has lost its significance, and the two parts of a name have been permanently joined in the surname Macdonald. It is Gaelic or Celtic.

MANY.—We do not think your theory upon the subject would interest the general reader, though we appreciate your good intention in writing it out for our perusal.

LAURA.—How would Annie Ernle do? Or, Annie Allene, Annie Zulene, Annie Evelyn? Elise, Ethel, or Eveline is pretty. We knew a girl called Annie Coralyn. Mrs. Ritchie, the charming actress, was called Annie Cora.

G. C. K.—Gilt ornaments can be readily cleaned with a soft brush dipped in hartshorn diluted with tepid water. Afterwards rinse them in clean water, and wipe them perfectly dry. A teaspoonful of hartshorn to a pint of water will be sufficient.

O. W. S.—The rubbing of two surfaces together attracts latent heat to those surfaces, because it is a law of nature that heat shall always attend motion; and it is generally found that the intensity of heat bears a specific relation to the velocity of motion.

L. T. S.—We would not advise you to go to Manitoba unless you have friends there to assist you. A young lady in a strange place needs friends much more than a young man, especially if she is seeking a teacher's position or other employment. The school trustees of the various towns select the teachers.

MILLIE.—It is not customary or right for an affianced young woman to receive a lover-like attention from another than her fiancé, particularly when he objects to this. If, in the face of his kind remonstrances and well-known opposition, she should persist in "flirting with her old beau," he could not be blamed for breaking the engagement.

P. D.—Letha, in Greek mythology, is one of the rivers of Hades, or hell, which the dead are obliged to taste in order to forget all they have done and suffered in the world they have just quitted. Charon was the boatman who ferried the souls of the dead across the Styx to Elysian Fields, or heaven. An obolus—a coin equal to a penny value—was put into the hand of every corpse to pay Charon's ferryage.

KITTY.—A cigar-case, collar-button, pair of gloves, box of handkerchiefs, or better still, some pretty trifle you have made, painted or embroidered, will be nice for your male friend's birthday gift. You can make him a pretty handkerchief or glove-case out of plush lined with satin, or a card and letter receiver can be made out of a common threepenny fan, a piece of cardboard, a bit of plush and satin, and some ribbon for bows.

E. S.—There is a preparation called bandoline sold for keeping bangs in curl. We think, however, it is only quince-seed water. We have seen girls use the water in which flax-seed or watermelon-seed have been soaked. They wet the hair with this before putting it up. A piece of wire as long as the finger, wound about with cotton, and then covered with bits of old kid glove, makes the best roller for putting up the hair. Long, pink finger-nails are prettier than flat, stubby ones. Rub your hands with glycerine and wear gloves at night.

CHARLES.—If you are married in church you slip the ring upon the bride's finger as you repeat that portion of the ceremony beginning "With this ring I thee wed." It must be put upon an ungloved finger, but as the removal of the glove (by the bridemaid) is a serious matter, now that the glove is worn so long as to answer for a sleeve, it is customary to rip one seam of the "bride finger" of the glove, or enough of it to permit the finger to slip through and receive the wedding-ring. Your best man can put the fee in the officiating clergyman's hand, or you can do this yourself shortly after the ceremony.

T. W. H.—The author of the quotation, "The pen is mightier than the sword," was Sir E. Bulwer Lytton. The study of geometry, apart from its more technical use, teaches precision—trains the eye and hand in accuracy of estimate and measuring.

A MOTHER'S HELP.—1. Hair bright brown; leave it alone. You will only make it brittle by waving it. Writing fair. 2. You should answer some of the advertisements in the papers and try your chance. It is not so much education that is wanted as patience with children, thoughtfulness, and some knowledge of household management and plain needlework.

E. E.—Take exercise, dance, row, walk, swinging your arms, bathe in warm water and use brisk friction. To add to your weight, eat nourishing food, drink milk, and use little coffee and no tobacco. Keep regular hours and do not dissipate. A young man addicted to fast habits is almost sure to be lean unless he drinks liquor, when he is apt to be unwholesomely and puffily fat.

E. S.—It was impossible to get a reply in print before the time named. You have doubtless invited your friends. It did not matter with the invitations, verbal or written, if it was a small, informal gathering. A note would have answered the purpose. It would be right when inviting a friend to a small, unceremonious party to say, "I would be glad to have you meet a few friends at our home on such an evening."

NETTA.—1. There is no reason why you should give him up if he is a nice young fellow. There are a thousand little ways you can let him know he is not indifferent to you, and then you can judge easily whether your affection is returned. You have no alternative but patience. 2. Tied with blue dark-brown a very handsome dress. Tied with pink a little lighter we should judge, but quite as attractive a shade, and, if anything, of rather finer texture.

DEAL KINDLY, KING WINTER.

Deal kindly, King Winter;
Send softly and slow;
The feathery flakes
Of the "beautiful snow";
And temper the fierce winds,
So cutting and chill,
For the poor are among us,
The needy and ill.

Thee and little child,
With her garments well worn,
Pleads mutely, oh, monarch,
At night and at morn,
For the blue summer sky
And the glorious sun
That will make the flowers blossom,
So fair, one by one.

The poor do not love thee,
For sad is their fate,
As they stand at each doorway,
Each area and gate;
And the prayers of their hearts,
As they strive to keep warm,
Is, "Deal kindly, King Winter,
And temper the storm."

M. A. K.

A. C. C.—Your early baldness may be constitutional or inherited. Does baldness "run in your family," as the common phrase goes? If so, it is difficult to prevent your hair falling out. Take an iron-and-sulphur tonic, and bathe your head frequently in warm water, to which is added a little salt and quinine. We never recommend any patent medicine or appliance, though some of these are quite efficient, no doubt. The appliance you speak of may be beneficial, but we would pin more faith to an iron and quinine tonic, good nourishing food, and outdoor exercise.

JANEY.—It depends on the girl, and the kind of young man, whether a pure friendly correspondence can be carried on between them. It is hard to "how to the line" in this case. The correspondence is apt to wax warm, or to incline towards flirtation, more or less frivolous and unimproving. A correspondence between a cultivated young man and woman might be made interesting and instructive, and friendship may exist between two young persons of opposite sexes, at once true and deep, but instances of these are rare. We must say it is often the woman's fault. She is not satisfied with friendship. She may not love the man, but she has a restless desire to have him say that he loves her, and she keeps artfully leading him on, and entrapping him into a declaration or an intimation of something warmer than friendship.

AARA.—MUNDOO is not the smallest State in Europe. The very tiny State of Moroset is smaller yet. Moroset is situated upon the confines of Belgium and Germany, between Verviers and Aix-la-Chapelle. It is only four miles square, and has a population of but 2,000 souls. It lies in a fertile valley, and has some rich zinc mines. To these mines it owes its existence as a separate principality. After the battle of Waterloo, Belgium and Prussia could not agree as to which should have the mines. They settled the question by making Moroset an independent province. Each of these States has a delegate within the borders of Little Moroset, and that small government has its "army," consisting of one soldier, who acts as gendarme and policeman. It is governed by a burgomaster. The smallest republic in the world is either Andorra or San Marino, we forget which.

F. L. L.—1. The young lady would not be called an old maid at the age named, but she is getting rather near "the shelf." 2. Tied with cardinal light brown; tied with white nut brown; tied with black golden auburn. It is entirely a matter of taste and opinion as to which would be generally preferred. Personally we admire that tied with white the best of the three, but the auburn dress is very beautiful, both in colour and texture. Of the third specimen there is hardly enough to judge by.

MAUD.—Your grey-blue eyes, fair skin, and yellow hair do not indicate boldness any more than they mean timidity. It is not from the colour of hair, eyes, and complexion that character can be determined. These count something, but they are not as good indexes as expression, contour of features and form of head, everyday manners, habits and tastes. It is from these a person's character can be told in part. Even then one may be at fault. Character can not be infallibly determined from the handwriting, the voice, the eye, the walk, though each of these may suggest characteristics.

EDNA.—The name Munkacy is pronounced as if spelt Moonkahohe, with the accent on the first syllable. Mr. Munkacy is a Hungarian. His real name is Miklos Letha, but when he became famous he took the name of his native town, adding a y to it, however. He worked his way up from the ranks. He was poor and a badly paid assistant in a joiner's shop. He learned the rudiments of his art from a sign-painter. His picture, "Christ before Pilate," is a grand dark, gloomy work. His Christ has more of the man than God in his form and looks.

TOM S.—Send your lady-love a present, a handsome card on an easel, a nice photograph album, pair of dark-tanned gloves, plush box of pretty writing-paper, or nice little portable writing desk, handsome holiday book, work-box, jewel-cased card receiver, or any one of the thousand pretty trifles in *brie-a-brac* for wall or dressing-case or mantel-piece decoration. Any of these is better than jewellery. Very black hair, deepest grey eyes, and nose slightly tip-tilted would seem to indicate a strong, self-reliant, independent nature, with a tenderness to self-assurance. Light-brown hair, a straight nose, and brown eyes would suggest refinement and tenderness.

LILLIE has painted a cluster of fuchsias in her friend's album, and asks for a rhyme about fuchsias to accompany the painting. Not recalling any, we offer this impromptu:

What is the fuchsia's charm? No flower
Is more admired in album or in bower;
Yet in the heart lingers no sweet perfume,
And other flowers display as rich a bloom.
Grace is the secret of the charm that dwells
Within the fuchsia's light and pendulous bells.
How stately they swing! You almost dream
The breeze that steals from yonder freshening stream
Will ring upon these dainty bells a chime
That will with unhearsd fairy music rhyme.
Beauty is praised by all beneath the sun;
But Grace is music, poetry, in one.

R. P. Y.—If you do not know whether you like your suitor well enough to marry him, how can we know that very necessary fact? You say you feel sometimes as though you loved him deeply, and at other times you are indifferent to positive dislike. Don't engage yourself to him by letter. Wait until you see him again. Try to analyze your feelings in the meantime. The reason he seems a little cool to you in company may be because he does not find that you are as well cultivated as he would like to have you, or as graceful and easy. Men are very sensitive in this matter. We have seen men who dearly loved their wives really nervous and unhappy when they were with them in society lest they should not appear well. Some men carry these to extremes. As a rule they are more sensitive in their way than women. A woman is capricious and changeable until she loves a man, and then she stands up for him no matter how he looks or how much others may find fault with him.

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